“I allowed myself the luxury of admiring her”

Examining the Gaze in Villette, The Woman in White, *and* Tess of the d’Urbervilles

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MA Thesis in English Literature

60 ECTS

The Department of Literature, Area Studies, and European Languages

The Faculty of Humanities

Spring 2022

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2022

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http://www.duo.uio.no

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

Abstract

This thesis explores Victorian sexuality and normative behavior as a direct result of the (male) gaze and Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism. The primary texts used for the analysis are Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. I will build on Foucault's theories with feminist theory in order to examine the expansive and adaptive nature of the gaze. The panoptical structure is important to the understanding of Victorian sexuality because it is ingrained in normative behavior and ideology, and thus functions as a lens through which we can understand the development of the sexual identities of the heroines in Victorian literature.

This thesis will argue that the gaze functions as an extension of the panoptical structure within (Victorian) society, and that it operates on different levels and manifests itself in different forms, and that gazing is not exclusively and inherently male. Each novel exemplifies a different aspect of the gaze: in *Villette*, it is judgmental and enforcing and mostly female. The gaze in the novel is institutionalized, with Lucy Snowe being a voyeuristic outlier. In *The Woman in White*, the gaze takes on a more sexual tone, as well as introducing us to a more direct male gaze. Again, the most important gaze is female (Marian Halcombe), but this time it is censored by the male gaze. Unlike the two previous novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* presents a more obviously layered form of gazing, stretching from the diegetic characters to the narrator, to the reader, all implicated in the novel's scopophilic schema: with the novel presenting the most sexualized and objectifying gaze, obliterating the image of woman. Most feminist critique bases its analyses on established gender norms, and thus reduces the range that the analyses might have obtained, narrowing the field rather than expanding it. The aim for this thesis is thus to break down established gender binaries and norms by exploring the different ways women in Victorian literature enact and understand their own feminine identity.

Acknowledgments

The process of writing this thesis has been an exciting one – a challenge which I have thoroughly enjoyed.

I would like to thank my advisor, Eleanor McCausland, for her wonderful feedback and help throughout this entire process.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for being so supportive.

Abbreviations

WW – The Woman in White

Tess – Tess of the d'Urbervilles

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Introduction

> Such a Juno as I have described, sat full in our view – a sort of mark for all eyes, and quite conscious that so she was, but proof to the magnetic influence of gaze or glance: cold, rounded, blonde, and beauteous, as the white column, capitalled with gilding, which rose at her side.[1]

Women have, for a long time, been oppressed by men. This presents itself in many different ways, as the tools of oppression vary. During the Victorian era, women relied heavily on men, having very few rights of their own. Up until the mid-century, married (middle- and upper-class) women were financially tied to their husbands through *coverture*, the legal doctrine in which women were "objects rather than subjects with rights," and they ultimately suffered the "absorption of [their] identity into [their] husband's [identity] subsequent to marriage."[2] Unmarried women were not bound by coverture, but were still deeply dependent on their fathers or brothers.[3] In addition to this forced reliance on men, women were constantly under supervision by society, being made to conform. According to Beth Newman, many of the canonical Victorian heroines, including Lucy Snowe, who will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, "refrain from being a cynosure," and that "[t]he Victorian novel is drawn repeatedly towards heroines who shrink from 'notice.'"[4] In other words, most Victorian heroines shy away from the gaze. Although they attempt to hide from the gaze, this thesis will show that they are never truly able to do so because of how much the gaze permeates society, and because of its ability to exist in several forms. The woman Lucy describes in the quotation above is exemplary of everything Lucy is not; yet this passage also exemplifies Lucy's own gaze. The 'Juno' is both beautiful and representative of the way that the gaze settles on women, and that women, in most cases, are quite conscious of its presence. My exploration of the gaze will base itself on Laura Mulvey's theories of objectifying male gazes and the sexualization of women, most explicitly discussed in my third chapter on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; but, for the thesis as a whole, I will use the notion of gaze in a more general form than Mulvey, and in a more supervisory essence. I

[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, eds. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 210.
[2] Anthony H. Harrison, "1848," in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 31; Linda K. Hughes, "1870," in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 38.
[3] Harrison, "1848," 31.
[4] Beth Newman, *Subjects on Display* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 3.

argue that the gazes within *Villette*, *The Woman in White*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* all present themselves differently, but that, at their core, they function as oppressive tools that stem from the panoptic structure of society. This thesis will explore the results the gaze has on the female characters in each novel, spanning from total oppression to emotional liberation. In addition, the gaze presents itself as not only a male activity, as many critics, such as Mulvey, claim, but rather something that both sexes partake in, adding layers and complexity to the different manifestations of the gaze. How women react and are affected by the gaze provides significant academic value, and potential for the illumination of the gendered power dynamics in Victorian literature. Each chapter in this thesis will explore these different aspects of the gaze and how they affect both the characters and the narrative. The focus will be to demonstrate how the gaze manifests itself differently depending on situation, and how that in turn affects the life of both the gazer and the object of the gaze.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault explains that sexuality, during the Victorian era, "was carefully confined; it moved into the home," where the "conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction" and "imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy."[5] This model of the 'perfect' domestic home thus maintained control of how female sexuality, or lack thereof, should be expressed. Anita Levy explains that "[m]iddle-class hegemony depends not only on institutions and practices of the state but upon the production and reproduction of people who 'make it' because they want others to love and a house in which to love them."[6] Although institutions were a big part of maintaining hegemony and normative rule, the gendered domestic ideal was controlled, on the micro level, by each citizen within society perpetuating the norms they were manipulated into believing were morally right. This is a part of the ideological construct on which most of Victorian society was based.

Although female sexuality within Victorian literature has been thoroughly discussed, much of the criticism seems to place the female characters within a gender binary, ignoring the constriction that this places on the analysis, as well as its perpetuation of old gender stereotypes. The exploration of femininity and how women are affected by the male gaze is often placed

[5] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 3.
[6] Anita Levy, *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender, 1832-1898* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 19.

within the confines of gender roles, and never explored separately. In many ways, all aspects of feminine life intertwine, such as race and class status; yet when it comes to the analysis of female characters, they are explored in a way that places them within a certain box, in an attempt to categorize them. What I hope this thesis achieves is to look at female characters within Victorian literature in a new light, and not through the narrow scope of the gender binary. According to Toril Moi, each critic and reader "speak[s] from a specific position shaped by cultural, social, political and personal factors," but it is also "difficult to believe that we can ever fully be aware of our own perspective."[7] By only looking at the 'realism' of the female character, a lot tends to be overlooked, and it ends up reducing the complexity of the character. It also positions the woman as an image, which is precisely what the male gaze does. In addition, there seems to be little criticism within the field of Victorian literature exploring how women gaze, as well as a greater focus on the gaze as a lone tool of oppression, perpetrated by lone men, and not as something that is institutionalized in society. In addition, many critics believe that only men are able to gaze; however, the gaze is just as available for women to utilize, and they are just as capable of gazing. This thesis aims to fill these gaps.

For this thesis, I have chosen to examine how surveillance and gazing affects the female characters of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The aim of this thesis is to discuss Victorian femininity and female identity: how it is affected by social norms as well as the male gaze, and how femininity is expressed in the female characters within Victorian literature. I will argue that there is no inherently correct way of expressing femininity, as the notion of gender is a social construct and highly affected by social change. I will also argue that, as stated, the gazes in these novels originate from the panoptic structure in Victorian society and that they are oppressive in their nature, although they express themselves differently in each novel. The constant awareness of being watched and being placed as an object for male gratification has a disastrous effect on how women construct their self-image, and how they interact with the outside world. I chose these novels because they present, and interact with, the gaze and surveillance, which in turn gives a greater depth to the discussion; it creates a wider representation of the gaze and its implications in female life. I will use established criticism to lay the foundation for my analysis: Michel

[7] Toril Moi, "'Images of Women' Criticism (1985)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 265.

Foucault's *panopticism*, combined with Judith Butler's theories of *gender performativity* (partly based on Foucault's panopticism), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" will form my framework for this thesis, assisted by other critics and philosophers such as Louis Althusser, Sigmund Freud, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Lyn Pykett.

In the Victorian canon, there are many works that are deemed progressive for their time, presenting the reader with strong and empowered female characters that break with the heteronormative and 'feminine' role thrust upon them by society. Yet, however strong these women are, we still see them struggle to break the chains of patriarchy and heteronormative society. This aspect of Victorian literature has been discussed by many before me. However, I argue that the use of Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon, combined with the aforementioned feminist theories, is going to shed a new light on how the norms of Victorian society play a major part in the formation of the identity of the female characters. Academics such as Beth Newman, Elizabeth Langland, Nancy Armstrong, and D. A. Miller, as well as other critics used later in the thesis, have all used Foucault's theories, both from *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), to explore different aspects of Victorian sexuality. Newman focuses on gazing and the female within Victorian literature, while Langland places her focus on domesticity and the Victorian angelic ideal. Armstrong explores sexuality in domestic fiction, and the effects it had on women and society, and Miller examines the policing, and social surveillance, of individuals within the Victorian novel.

Both Armstrong's and Miller's use of Foucault's theories, according to Langland, "culminate in compelling narratives of the emergence of the bourgeois subject;" however, neither of them "adequately explores the possibility of discursive instability as a site for social change, especially in the role of middle-class women."[8] According to Langland, the understanding of gender norms and sexuality needs to change and be less idealized, showing that these norms are not fixed, but rather have a more discontinuous and flowing nature due to inevitable sociocultural changes and that nothing ever truly stays fixed or unchanged.[9] The perspectives presented by these critics are all important; but, for this thesis, I believe that all

[8] Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 5.
[9] Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, 5.

these different aspects of Victorian sexuality and gender norms that have been discussed are more entangled and should thus be analyzed in connection with each other rather than apart. I believe that by only looking at one aspect of Victorian sexuality through the lens of panopticon, we neglect the more integrated nature of the power of the gaze and surveillance, and how it connects each individual in society. Armstrong claims that the panopticon is "incomplete in itself as a model of culture,"[10] with which I agree. While she uses Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of *carnival*, stating that societal norms and connections between people were equally important in the representation of culture, I believe that the panopticon functions as the consequence of cultural behavior and the reinforcement of it.[11] The panopticon is thus not a model of culture, but rather the *result* of culture. Consequently, the existence of the panoptical structure within society has in turn weaponized the gaze and aimed it at women.

According to Louis Althusser, ideology "represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production […] but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations derived from them" and that "[w]hat is represented […] is therefore not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the *imaginary* relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live."[12] Hence, ideology is how the world is interpreted and understood, and is thus highly subjective. The way in which ideology functions is through the hailing, or *interpellation*, of subjects. Through interpellation, individuals are turned into ideological subjects – without subjects, there is no ideology. Everything exists inside an ideology, and one is very rarely aware that one is inside of it. In fact, many are so unaware of this interpellation that they believe themselves to exist *outside* of it.[13] The ideology one is a part of becomes the 'truth,' the correct way of living, and anything that veers away from normative behavior, the status quo, is considered "wicked […] 'inconsistent' […] cynical, or perverse."[14] It is this 'truth' of morality and domesticity that was the foundation of Victorian gender norms, and thus informed the

[10] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23.
[11] Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 23.
[12] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation) (1970)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 451-452 (italics added).
[13] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 455-457.
[14] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 453.

panoptical gaze which was enforced by its inhabitants. This is also prevalent in Victorian literature, as it is affected by its societal context.

While common misconceptions of Victorian sexuality deem it prudish, and in some cases non-existent, the reality was that sexuality was not regulated as much, rather, it was hidden. In most cases, the repression of sexual urges was functional enough; but in the cases where it was not, sexual transgressors and 'deviants' were permitted their "infernal mischief" if it was at a "place where they could be reintegrated."[15] Sex was a "vital force to be carefully regulated and conserved, with potentially dire consequences awaiting those who 'spend' too much."[16] The 'erasure' of sex from the public eye laid the foundation of the *angel in the house*, the domestic Victorian ideal for women. Not only did the perpetuation of this stereotype, both in literature and real life, aid in the suppression of 'immorality,' it also functioned as a tool for oppressing women.[17] By society placing this angelic ideal as the norm, women were manipulated into believing that adherence to it was their only way of succeeding in life. At the center of this ideal, this ideological symbol, we find the schematic for the panoptic structure in Victorian society. Through the use of normative roles and figures as the blueprint for identity, the fear of failure is enough to make any woman conform. The 'fallen woman' was one example of this 'failure.' These women did not 'spend' their sex and sexuality in the approved fashions and were thus permanently branded as outcasts.

Foucault's concept of panopticism is based on Jeremy Bentham's prison model of the Panopticon. This prison was purely theoretical and was never actualized; however, its academic application has been immense.[18] Panopticism, I will argue, is at the center of Victorian heteronormative behavior and social organization. The notion of self-control and self-moderation being the foundation of moral high ground has a strong impact on the female characters and their lives; how their identity is formed and developed. By having a constant gaze put upon them, the female characters start to conform to the image that society is forcing them to inhabit, ultimately creating a performative identity. The model of this prison is, ultimately, the opposite of a

[15] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 4.
[16] James Eli Adams, "Victorian Sexualities," in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture,* ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 127.
[17] Adams, "Victorian Sexualities," 129.
[18] Robert Dale Parker, headnote to "Panopticism (1975)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies,* by Michel Foucault, ed. Robert Dale Parker, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 493.

dungeon – nothing is locked away, but rather put on display. Each inmate is under supervision; but, due to the structure of the cells they are kept in, they are never aware of when someone is actually watching them. Because of the constant threat of surveillance, any action that can lead to punishment is suppressed and moderated by the inmates themselves.[19] This shifts the responsibility from the guards to the inmates, ultimately making them their own captors. The threat of punishment is more deterring than the punishment itself. This constant threat functions as a tool society uses to keep others in line – to follow the normative structures of said society.

As I will argue in this thesis, the gaze functions as an extension of panopticism; the concept itself is based on the threat of someone seeing transgressive behavior. The gaze also never exists by itself: it is entangled in ideology, norms, personal experiences, and expectations. According to John Berger, the "way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe," and that we "never look at just one thing" but rather that we are "looking at the relation between things and ourselves."[20] Gazing is thus very subjective, enforcing the gazers' pre-existing bias, and is used by the 'gazee' to situate themself within society. This bias is also noticeable in literature criticism, as noted by Moi. According to her, many critics analyze female literary characters based on personal experiences, and Moi's criticism of this is directed at a collection of essays entitled *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (1973), compiled and edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon. These essays aimed to analyze the female character by exploring how 'realistic' she was, with writing being "seen as a more or less faithful *reproduction* of an external reality to which we all have equal and unbiased access, and which therefore enables us to criticize the author on the grounds that he or she created an *incorrect* model of the reality we somehow all know."[21]

The male gaze, in relation to cinema, was famously examined and critiqued by Laura Mulvey. She claims that the male gaze "projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly," and that "[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact."[22] Thus, according to Mulvey, women are merely objects for male gratification. Berger's

[19] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism (1975)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker, trans. Alan Sheridan (Oxford University Press, 2012), 497-498.
[20] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1975), 8, 9.
[21] Moi, "'Images of Women' Criticism," 264-266 (italics in original).
[22] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 236.

interpretation of the gaze is similar to Mulvey's, in that "*men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."[23] To Berger, "the social presence of a woman is different in kin from that of a man," continuing that a "man's presence is dependent upon the power which he embodies," while a "woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself."[24] In *Villette*, the gaze functions as a surveilling eye, with each character surveilling those around them in some form or other; in *The Woman in White*, it is a judgmental and surveilling gaze, with hints of *scopophilia*; and in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, it is an overtly scopophilic gaze.

A lot of criticism regarding feminist analyses, in general, has been aimed at the lack of inclusivity of women of color. I acknowledge this, and I also recognize that my corpus is, in the same way, exclusive. Feminist critics, such as bell hooks, took issue with Mulvey's narrow representation of women in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," claiming that Mulvey failed to include women of color in her analysis of the male gaze. According to hooks, "black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs [their] presence as absence," something that "denies the 'body' of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is 'white.'"[25] Thus, the gaze of Black women was constructed differently, and her body was placed outside the phallocentric regime. What hooks expresses is that White women became the center of the phallocentric oppression of women and the 'true' image of pleasure, with the Black female characters' "bodies and being[s]" only being present to "enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallocentric gaze."[26] The exploration of male gaze within Victorian literature in this thesis is thus based on White female characters, narrowing the scope somewhat. The focus is not purposely on White women, but due to the lack of primary texts written by, and containing women of color, this exclusion is not intentional. It is important to acknowledge that women of color are also just as oppressed as White women, if not more so. However, the focus in this thesis is on Victorian gender norms and conventions in relation to the intersectionality of gender and class and will not highlight race due to it being

[23] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47 (italics in original).
[24] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 45, 46.
[25] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators (1992)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 272.
[26] hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 273.

outside the scope of the thesis. The novels chosen for this thesis present women of different classes, and explore how that, combined with gender norms, affect how they see and are seen.

As previously mentioned, the novels that I will use to explore these theories and ideas are *Villette* by Brontë, *The Woman in White* by Collins, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Hardy. These novels are good examples of the different ways the constant surveillance and gaze upon the Victorian woman affects her life. Each novel exemplifies different avenues of the panoptic structure that shape its narrative and shows a progression in the understanding of Victorian womanhood and femininity through the use of surveillance and the (male) gaze. The gaze moves from a lack of overt sexual tones mainly focused on surveillance, to a vague sexual gaze, still inquisitive and surveilling, to a very overt sexual gaze. The novels in this thesis are discussed and analyzed in the order of publication, so as to emphasize and understand the development of Victorian values and morality from the 1850s to the 1890s and how that affects the characterization of the female characters in these works.

In the first chapter, I will analyze the notion of the gaze and surveillance in *Villette* and how that affects the life of Lucy Snowe, as well as some of the other female characters, namely Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe. Thus, I will explore the gender performativity that ensues from constant surveillance and will therefore make use of Butler's theories. To Butler, gender is an action that "requires a performance that is *repeated*," and "those who fail to do their gender right" incur punishment as a result of this.[27] In *Villette*, many of the female characters are trapped by the panopticon and feel the need to conform in order to escape punishment. In the novel, there is both overt and covert surveillance of Lucy, most notably by Madame Beck and M. Paul. Throughout the novel, both characters are seen surveilling those around them, as well as often going through their belongings.

In the second chapter, I will explore the evolution of the gaze and surveillance in *The Woman in White*, analyzing how the gaze placed upon Marian Halcombe and Laura Fairlie differs and how they react to it. Marian, unlike her sister Laura, is more autonomous and freer in her movements, even having a gaze of her own. *The Woman in White* presents a different form of femininity that is not rooted in domesticity, thus challenging established Victorian gender norms. In this chapter, I will thus also examine how this new femininity is expressed and shaped by the

[27] Judith Butler, "*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990)," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 331.

gaze. The gaze also shifts away from being solely surveilling like it is in *Villette* and presents more sexualization of women.

For the final chapter, I will continue and conclude the exploration of the gaze in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, but with different context. I will use Mulvey's theory of the gaze. In her article, she uses both the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and I will build some on this, using Freud's concept of scopophilia. This is especially relevant for the analysis of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, with it being the only novel with overt sexual imagery. The gaze that is placed upon Tess is detrimental to her development as a woman. She is constantly enveloped in Alec's lust towards her, making her behavior shift when he is around. Her entire life is changed due to his sexualized gaze upon her, as the rape by, and later her murder of, Alec sets her on a completely different path. Constant surveillance leads to performativity and suppression, and it is important to analyze the characters in each novel through this lens, and to see how those who do not conform break with those established patterns. Each novel discussed in this thesis represents an aspect of the gaze: oppression (*Villette*), liberation (*The Woman in White*), and violence (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*).

1. Women Enforcing Gazes: *Villette* and Projected Identity

> This was a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where no tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine.[1]

This quotation encapsulates the panoptic structure found in both the novel *Villette* and its titular town. According to Margaret Shaw, the surveillance carried out by Madame Beck, as well as M. Paul, "provides the policing function for bourgeois society, especially for female society, since it spies out and controls female sexuality – the unspoken, unseen, and potentially disruptive" to the status quo.[2] The Rue Fossette, as well as the town of Villette as a whole, double as the prison, and the totalitarian surveillance system becomes a representation of society as a whole. It gives us, as readers, insight into the mechanics of it all, and how difficult it really is not to become entwined in this oppressive system.

Throughout the novel, we are introduced to several characters, each representing a form of the gaze, either as the beholder or as the one being watched – in some cases both. According to Sandro Jung, Lucy (and M. Paul) and Madame Beck represent different gazes. I agree with this to some degree. Jung claims that Lucy's gaze is "a moralized one, wishing to help her student to reconsider her behaviour," while Madame Beck's gaze is "a criminalized gaze; she suspects that she may find secrets and, in so doing, gain power over the person spied on."[3] There is a constant power struggle, with the characters being unaware that they are fighting the wrong enemy. Butler's interpretation of Foucault's panopticism is that "the strategy has not been to enforce a repression of their desires, but to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style, and necessity."[4] Her understanding is that Victorian morality was not physically enforced, but rather transferred into the people themselves. Each person represented the 'prohibitive law' in their very being. This aligns with the avenues of exploration I intend to take in this thesis. Panopticism is still highly ingrained in our societal fabric, as it was during the

[1] Brontë, *Villette*, 231.
[2] Margaret L. Shaw, "Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34, no. 4 (Autumn, 1994): 828.
[3] Sandro Jung, "Curiosity, Surveillance and Detection in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," *Brontë Studies* 35, no. 2 (2010): 168, 166.
[4] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 327.

Victorian era. The basis of Foucault's theory is that the threat of constant surveillance makes the inmates police themselves, so as not to incur the punishment of their captors. Madame Beck's Pensionnat de Demoiselles is the panoptic prison, the students and teachers its prisoners. The panoptic structure in the novel imposes constant watching, managing ceaseless gazes that force behavior to form and change in the watched subjects – especially Lucy Snowe, whose identity differs depending on who is beholding her.

Villette presents the most literal representation of Foucault's panoptic theory out of the novels being discussed in this thesis. All of the characters in the novel are, in some form, responsible for the perpetuation of the panoptic structure in which the novel is placed. In this chapter, I will argue that the panoptic structure deeply permeates *Villette*, not only in the pensionnat at the Rue Fossette, but in the town of Villette as a whole, and that the sheer societal pressure put upon women by the threat of constant surveillance and gazes creates a false belief within women that they must conform and perform the established gender roles to feel like they still are a part of society. I will also argue that through this need for remaining within the comfort that society provides them, many women are manipulated into believing that they need to surveil their own behavior, as well as that of other women, in turn becoming the silent tools of the patriarchy, keeping each other oppressed under the guise of morality and 'womanhood.' A lot of the manipulation has already taken place, so the chapter will analyze the consequences of this and how it articulates itself in the plot and the characters. In addition, I will argue that the gaze in *Villette* is not male in its totality, but rather female, and that it is this female gaze, especially Lucy Snowe's, informed by heteronormativity, that is the most damaging gaze in the novel.

The gaze is commonly understood as male and is something that constantly affects female behavior; and, although this is accurate in many cases, this chapter will also focus on the female gaze presented by Lucy Snowe and Madame Beck and its implications in the grand panoptic scheme of the novel. The female gaze is not something that is often analyzed in literature, and this chapter aims to contribute to this discussion. The gaze in *Villette* also opens up discussion of the role of the woman in the oppressive schema of Victorian society, to show that not only men contribute to the oppression of women through the use of ingrained gender normativity. What is especially interesting with *Villette* is the number of gazes that permeate the story. This novel exemplifies the amalgamation of Foucault's panopticism and Butler's ideas of

gender performativity, shedding light on how intertwined the two theories are, and how ingrained the concept of gender is in our very being.

Firstly, I will examine the structure of the panopticon within *Villette* and discuss how each member of the Rue Fossette is entangled in a web of espionage, gazing, and surveillance. The focus will, in this first part, be on Madame Beck and M. Paul, as they form the inner workings of the panoptic gazing. Secondly, I will explore Lucy Snowe and how she is affected by the constant surveillance she experiences in the Rue Fossette. Throughout the narrative, Lucy is quite elusive, and this stems from her reaction to being watched. I will explore Lucy's reluctance to be gazed at and share her identity with others, even the readers of her narrative. Thirdly, I will discuss the notion of Victorian gender norms, and how they are affected and informed by ideological constructs. In this section, Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe will be the focus, as they stand in opposition to each other in terms of gender ideals and performativity. I will also discuss how the two women are seen by Lucy, and how her gaze presents a paradoxical understanding of Lucy's values. Finally, I will conclude with the analysis of the nature of the gazes in *Villette*, especially Lucy's. Lucy's gaze, as well as her ideals, are dichotomous. Lucy is the only character in the novel who gazes for the sake of pleasure; but through her narrative, although cloaked and full of subterfuge, her gaze is also oppressive, showing that Lucy, just as any of the other women in *Villette*, are a part of the panoptic structure, whether they are aware of it or not.

1.1 Dutiful Watchers

> It is true that madame had her own system for managing and regulating this mass machinery; and a very pretty system it was: the reader has seen a specimen of it, in that small affair of turning my pocket inside out, and reading my private memoranda. "Surveillance," "espionage," – these were her watch words.[5]

From this early description of Madame Beck, her nature becomes abundantly clear; and, as readers, we know what to expect from her from the very beginning. She looms everywhere, always keeping a watchful eye on those around her. Just as with the invisible guards of the panopticon, Madame Beck's gaze sees all; her ears hear all; she is everywhere and nowhere. At

[5] Brontë, *Villette*, 72.

least, that is what she wishes the subjects of her surveillance to believe – the image she presents is that of the all-knowing observer. In truth, she is successful in this endeavor. Her efforts to surveil and control those around her are mostly effective, with the exception of Lucy, whose arrival in Villette threatens Madame Beck's despotic rule.

As the main tool of the panopticon in *Villette*, Madame Beck, along with M. Paul, keeps a tight grip on the students and employees in her pensionnat: she spies on them, goes through their belongings, copies keys, and even gets them to spy on each other in order to keep everyone intertwined in her web of surveillance and control, "plotting and counter-plotting, spying and receiving the reports of spies all day."[6] This not only gives her eyes and ears *everywhere* in the pensionnat, but it makes everyone accountable – she is no longer the sole guard. As described by Joseph Boone, Madame Beck "consolidates her power by becoming an invisible, all-seeing presence that is everywhere at once but seen by no one, not unlike Bentham's model of the Panopticon."[7] Her behavior perfectly exemplifies how the panoptic structure grows and forms in society – everyone becomes both guard and inmate, self-policing in order to maintain the status quo and avoid punishment.[8] It is these ever-present gazes that form the framework of surveillance and control in *Villette*. They are a constant presence looming over our characters.

Just as with the setting and plot of the novel, both Madame Beck and M. Paul were inspired by Brontë's stay in Brussels. Their real-life counterparts were the married couple Claire Zoë and Constantine Heger. During her stay at the Pensionnat Heger, Brontë fell in love with Constantine Heger. These feelings were unrequited and led to her isolation.[9] The dynamic between Claire Heger and Brontë is reflected in the novel, as Madame Beck is overly protective of her cousin. Where the novel differs from reality is the relationship between Lucy and M. Paul. Where Brontë's love for Constantine Heger was never reciprocated, their literary counterparts are able to live out the love story Brontë sorely wished for herself, excluding the ambiguous, tragic ending.

Together, Madame Beck and M. Paul combine to be the totalitarian watchers of the Pensionnat de Demoiselles. The pensionnat represents "a microcosm of the state itself,

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[6] Brontë, *Villette*, 69, 73.
[7] Joseph A. Boone, "Depolicing *Villette*: Surveillance, Invisibility, and the Female Erotics of 'Heretic Narrative,'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 26, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992): 23.
[8] Foucault, "Panopticism," 498.
[9] Tim Dolin, introduction to *Villette*, by Charlotte Brontë, eds. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiii.

embodying in the person of its ever-capable director the methods by which the larger social order maintains its power."[10] Ultimately, their constant surveillance creates a toxic and strict environment. Their function is to keep the unwanted aspects of society in check so that the members of the bourgeoisie can turn a blind eye to them and maintain their 'peaceful' existence, living in their bubble of supposed moral superiority. M. Paul describes them as having a duality in their behavior – one public and one private:

> "And my pupils," he presently recommenced, "those blondes jeunes filles – so mild and meek – I have seen the most reserved – romp like boys, the demurest – snatch grapes from the walls, shake pears from the trees."[11]

It is this duality, this hidden personality, that Madame Beck and M. Paul want to watch over and protect against because of its threat to their way of life. They wish to maintain control over the girls in order to keep this private side hidden. As long as it is not visible, it is no threat – it is as if it never existed. This behavior is so abhorrent to M. Paul because it bears masculine behavioral markers, rather than feminine ones. It is fine for boys to be mischievous, but this does not apply to girls. Butler claims that gender is performative, and thus these actions go against M. Paul's expectations of femininity because they are, to him, inherently male behavior. The "identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."[12] Their actions are disruptive to his understanding of femininity and womanhood, and thus disruptive to society as a whole.

The tactics used by Madame Beck to surveil her students and employees were not uncommon in the Victorian era , at least, not in Brontë's own experiences at the Cowan Bridge School, where, as described by Elizabeth Gaskell, "[a]ll letters and parcels are inspected by the superintendent," and that this was a "very prevalent regulation in all young ladies' schools."[13] Letters were read in order to maintain the purity of the young girls – to shield them from improper and inappropriate material. Schools such as these took the morality and propriety of their students just as seriously as their academic education.[14] The real system of surveillance in

[10] Boone, "Depolicing *Villette*," 23.
[11] Brontë, *Villette*, 365.
[12] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 329 (italics in original).
[13] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Angus Easson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51.
[14] Birgitta Berglund, "In Defense of Madame Beck," *Brontë Studies* 30, no. 3 (Summer, 2005): 190.

Victorian-era English schools is thus mirrored and represented in *Villette*, with the girls' moral education being in the hands of their headmistress. While Madame Beck and M. Paul's wish is to keep the inhabitants in the Rue Fossette under control, Madame Beck only watches and acts on the information she gets from these endeavors – she is the silent watcher. Her gazes are out of necessity, and are almost clinical, lacking any sense of emotion. She is described by Lucy as being "devoid of sympathy" and any "attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy."[15]

The panoptic structure is itself an ideological construct, and the gazes in *Villette* function as an extension of its oppressive nature. Bentham's panopticon was a prison apparatus used to keep criminals and deviants under control; Foucault's panopticon is a theoretical apparatus ingrained in society based on norms and ideology. Ideology is a very effective tool for maintaining control and obtaining power; it is a "falsified representation of the world which they [those in power] have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations."[16] The ideology present in *Villette* is very representative of Victorian ideology and morality concerning the understanding of femininity and female sexuality. A woman was to be a "quasi-spiritual being selflessly dispensing love and moral guidance to her family, largely untroubled by wayward personal desires – including erotic longing."[17] It is this aspect of Victorian ideology that M. Paul is trying to enforce through his gazing. The whole function of his character, and Madame Beck's, is to look at and observe their pupils, and make sure they conform enough to normative rule. Each character uses their own methods to maintain control over the girls. They have both been conditioned into believing that this immaculate ideal of the purity and chastity constitutes the 'proper and true' way that people, especially young women, should behave and feel. Therefore, as contributing members of society, it is their responsibility to quash any transgressions. It becomes clear that many of the students fear both Madame Beck and M. Paul, especially M. Paul, due to his violent anger. M. Paul's temper tantrums are plentiful in the novel, and often function as a tool to keep the female students in check:

[15] Brontë, *Villette,* 74.
[16] Althusser, "Ideology," 451.
[17] Adams, "Victorian Sexualities," 129.

> Many of the girls […] were not pure-minded at all, very much otherwise; but they no more dare betray their natural coarseness in M. Paul's presence, than they dare tread purposely on his corns.[18]

M. Paul often displays violent bursts of anger when he sees things that he deems improper. During the dinner party at the Hotel Crécy, he yells at Lucy after he mistakenly believes her to be flirting with Graham Bretton, calling her a "'Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette! […] vous avez l'air bien triste, soumise, rêveuse, mais vous ne l'êtes pas; c'est moi qui vous le dis; Sauvage! la flame à l'âme, l'éclair aux yeaux!'"[19] Because of his feelings for Lucy, and the belief that she is behaving 'incorrectly' for her character – irrespective of whether it is true or not – he attacks her verbally, ultimately attempting to police her behavior.

Madame Beck's methods of surveillance are exemplary of how she, in combination with M. Paul, form the main structure of the Villettean panopticon. She is the unseen force, surveilling from the shadows – there is always uncertainty regarding whether or not she is watching. Lucy only discovers her once, noticing she is being observed and her belongings searched through while Madame Beck believes her to be asleep. She [Madame Beck] moves "without perceptible sound" and studies Lucy while she is 'sleeping.'[20] Lucy permits this, mostly out of curiosity. After Madame Beck's surveillance and investigation has been done to a satisfying degree, Lucy's belongings were "returned to [their] place" and her clothes "were carefully folded."[21] Madame Beck's meticulousness ensures no evidence of her activities, so everything has the possibility of having been seen or unseen – only Madame Beck knows the truth. Madame Beck's inmates, her students, are "seen, but [do] not see;" they are "the object of information, never a subject of communication."[22] They are constantly watched and have no power themselves. This provides enough uncertainty that her subjects always believe they are being watched, and act accordingly. Madame Beck's potential presence is what keeps all the students and employees beneath her under her control.

In her extensive network of espionage, Madame Beck's spies are simply seen as tools: "she of course had her staff of spies: she perfectly knew the quality of the tools she used."[23]

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[18] Brontë, *Villette*, 143.
[19] Brontë, *Villette*, 318.
[20] Brontë, *Villette*, 69.
[21] Brontë, *Villette*, 69.
[22] Foucault, "Panopticism," 497.
[23] Brontë, *Villette*, 74.

Although not fully convinced by her own methods, Madame Beck still utilizes them in order to maintain control over her pensionnat:

> she seemed to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint, in blind ignorance, and under surveillance that left them no moment and no corner for retirement, was not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women; but she averred that ruinous consequences would ensue if any other method were tried with continental children – they were so accustomed to constraint, that relaxation, however guarded, would be misunderstood and fatally presumed on.[24]

Madame Beck is aware that her surveillance affects those watched by her and that she is creating a negative environment. However, she believes this is the method that works best; thus, the ends justify the means. So ingrained in the panopticon is she, that, in order to maintain some semblance of control and superiority, she perpetuates the system she dislikes. The hegemonic system meant to keep people (predominantly women) in check has ultimately brainwashed every participant in the constant surveillance, even Madame Beck. Society has instilled in her the belief that women are not capable of 'behaving' if they go unobserved, and thus need to be under continuous surveillance in order to not upset the status quo and for them to function in society. Madame Beck, as with many other female characters in *Villette*, seemingly believes that women need to 'behave,' or at least seem like they are, in order to fully reach their potential as women, even though they do so within the confines set by men. Madame Beck's reaction to her daughter Desirée's thieving is rather odd, considering her stance on truth. Rather than lecturing her daughter and trying to teach her some sense of morality, she turns a blind eye and returns the stolen items, and in doing so she "blurs the distinctions between right and wrong while she is doing her 'duty' in the cause of surveillance."[25] However, it never seems to cross the mind of any of the female characters in *Villette*, especially Lucy and Madame Beck, that their constant surveillance over others is what also keeps *them* under normative control. They are under the false impression that they are the guards, keeping society safe, when in fact it is quite the opposite. The panoptic structure is perfect in its form, because it manages to make everyone believe that they have the control over others, as guards, while the truth is that they are ultimately their own oppressor. Madame Beck even claims to be "sick […] of the means she had

[24] Brontë, *Villette*, 73.
[25] Brontë, *Villette*, 94; Jung, "Curiosity," 165.

to use […] but use them she must."[26] To her, there is no other method to keep the order she wishes, exemplifying how deeply she has been interpellated into the ideology. She appears to believe that there is no other way for her to maintain the status quo, and that she *has* to maintain it, while being blind to its true oppressive, and patriarchal, structure. Just as her tools of espionage are tangled in her scheme of surveillance, Madame Beck is a tool for surveilling others and is thus oppressive in her behavior. She wants to hold control over the school, but does not maintain that control for herself, despite believing that she does. The control she craves has sexist and patriarchal undertones, since it only pertains to women. This seems obvious, as she runs a school for young girls – but these are the people she strives to control. M. Paul, on the other hand, is more of a free agent, not only due to his gender, but because he has not been manipulated by society in the same manner as Madame Beck.

M. Paul's gaze is the only explicit male gaze in the novel, and thus presents itself differently, both from the other gazes in *Villette*, as well as the male gazes in *The Woman in White* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Unlike Madame Beck, M. Paul has a different approach to the enactment of his gaze. He is more focused on Lucy than on watching all of the inhabitants of the Rue Fossette, although he is a part of Madame Beck's structure of surveillance. To M. Paul, "the close observation is intentional" and "a way to acquire power over women by learning to 'read them like a book.'"[27] Whereas Madame Beck rifles through belongings carefully, always making sure everything is left the way she found it, M. Paul wants Lucy to know that he goes through her things. He leaves books and chocolate in her desk and purposely smokes his cigar while doing so, because she dislikes the smell, in order for her to know it was him.[28] His power lies more in his presence than in the potentiality of it. He observes, but rarely makes his presence known, and does not wish it to be known either – he enjoys watching people without their knowledge of it. This does not include Lucy, of course, in whom he confides regarding his surveillance: "I watch you and others pretty closely, pretty constantly, nearer and oftener than you or they think."[29]

M. Paul's motivations for his gazing highly differ from those of Madame Beck. While Madame Beck's motivations seem to lie with wanting knowledge about everything and everyone

[26] Brontë, *Villette*, 73.
[27] Shaw, "Narrative Surveillance," 816.
[28] Brontë, *Villette*, 343, 346.
[29] Brontë, *Villette*, 363.

in order to control them, M. Paul's seem to focus on the protection of those he watches. He keeps an eye on those around him in order to protect them from anything that he deems improper: he censors the books he gives his students, as well as the one's he leaves in Lucy's desk; he limits the gaze of those around him, especially Lucy.[30] This becomes very clear in the incident between M. Paul and Lucy in the museum. While sitting and looking at the Cleopatra, she is interrupted by M. Paul: "How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?"[31] This whole interaction is very interesting because he "attempts to prohibit her observation of unveiled female anatomy."[32] Not only does he question her ability and 'permission' to look at whatever she pleases, he physically removes her from the presence of the painting. Lucy's description of the painting gives clues as to why M. Paul wishes to 'protect' her eyes:

> It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought than the life. […] She lay half-reclined on a couch […] She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material – seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery – she managed to make inefficient raiment.[33]

M. Paul believes Lucy to be a 'proper' lady; hence, she should not be looking at images of scantily clad women. He becomes "the exaggerated figure of male censorship, trying to determine Lucy's field of perceptions and her models of sexual identity."[34] In many ways, M. Paul represents the imposition of Victorian morality. He watches his students under the guise of protection and safekeeping, when in fact his gaze is there to protect those within the higher parts of the societal hierarchy rather than those constrained by it. He states to Lucy that "[y]ou need watching, and watching over,"[35] implying that she, and the other female students of the pensionnat, are in need of his surveillance in order to be 'safe' from impropriety. In M. Paul's mind, it is his duty to be their protector, their 'guardian angel' – when, in reality, he is just as complicit in the oppression of women.[36] What we see with M. Paul's gaze is that he does not sexualize, but it is controlling in nature.

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[30] Brontë, *Villette*, 346-347.
[31] Brontë, *Villette*, 201.
[32] Boone, "Depolicing *Villette*," 24.
[33] Brontë, *Villette*, 199-200.
[34] Shaw, "Narrative Surveillance," 819.
[35] Brontë, *Villette*, 363.
[36] Shaw, "Narrative Surveillance," 816.

M. Paul holds the false belief that the women around him, especially in the Rue Fossette, are in need of his protection, and that there are dangers to their propriety and purity *everywhere*. He has very normative ideas of gender roles, in accordance with Victorian ideology, even going so far as to claim that a "'woman of intellect,' it appeared, was a sort of 'lusus naturæ,' a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker."[37] With the power he has gained as teacher and watcher in the Villettean panopticon, he forcefully strips the women under his 'watch' of their autonomy by dictating what is allowed and what is prohibited in terms of their behavior, appearance, and beliefs. M. Paul himself "ha[s] a strong relish for public representation in his own person, but an extreme abhorrence of the like display in any other."[38] This is especially applicable to Lucy, as she portrays the persona of a meek and quiet woman, incapable of any improper behavior. At their first encounter, M. Paul does discern a duality within her; but slowly, as Lucy's façade begins to crack, M. Paul starts to discover a more autonomous and strong-willed woman. In many ways, she is his equal, which is something he seems to struggle with. Every time she stands her ground or behaves in opposition to M. Paul's image of her, he explodes in anger, scolding her fiercely:

> "One ought to be 'dur' with you. You are one of those beings who must be *kept down*. I know you! I know you! Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed."[39]

Unlike Lucy, Ginevra possesses all the attributes M. Paul seems to detest in a woman – she is vain, coquettish, and selfish. However, there are no confrontations between him and Ginevra in the novel. Ginevra is not a 'proper' woman by any means, but she still conforms to the gendered structure of Victorian society. She plays her role of the coquette to perfection, waiting for a man to turn her into his own 'angel in the house.' M. Paul's focus seems to be mostly on Lucy, which is interesting, as she is not as improper as he makes her out to be. However, it is difficult to take everything at face value, as Lucy is our only purveyor of information regarding the events of the novel. M. Paul seems to lash out at Lucy, maybe out of jealousy, or because he is angered by her

[37] Brontë, *Villette*, 354.
[38] Brontë, *Villette*, 354.
[39] Brontë, *Villette*, 155.

unwillingness to conform. He seems to believe that he is savior of all his female pupils, when, in reality, he has unwittingly become a tool of the patriarchy.

It is important to understand the underlying foundation of the surveillance system at play in *Villette* and how that, in turn, informs the gazes within the novel. Madame Beck and M. Paul make up most of this foundation. However, as we will see later in this chapter, Lucy's gaze is also informed by this structure; but it does not seem to have the power of enforcing behavior, only condemning it. These concepts, considered in relation to the other characters, create a better understanding of the novel's setting, and how the different gazes within the novel, especially Madame Beck's, affect behavior, especially that of Lucy Snowe and Paulina Home. The examination of Madame Beck and M. Paul's roles in the novel opens up a wider understanding of gender and how the gaze permeates every aspect of someone's life, whether they are aware of it or not. Their actions exemplify how easy it is to become entangled in espionage, and how easily surveillance changes both one's behavior and the understanding of one's own self.

1.2 Everchanging Identities

In a world with prying eyes everywhere, watching your every move, Lucy Snowe manages to remain mostly unseen – at least, the *real* Lucy Snowe does. Throughout the novel, her true character is never fleshed out in a completely satisfying manner. Lucy is an elusive character and narrator, withholding important and relevant information from both the reader and the other characters. She is extremely guarded, often suppressing her emotions and reactions. Ultimately, Lucy manages to hide from both those who observe her in the Rue Fossette, as well as those who observe her story: "'I mean I value vision, and dread being struck blind.'"[40] Lucy's ability to see is ingrained in her being; it is how she understands others and herself, and watching others is an activity she takes great joy in doing. To her, "[v]isibility is a trap."[41] Through the gazes of those around her, as well as her own, she learns how to navigate through life and society. She sees but is never truly seen.

As the narrator of *Villette*, Lucy is in control of the narrative, which in this case is highly edited, often elides important events and how characters and events are presented to the reader.

[40] Brontë, *Villette*, 425.
[41] Foucault, "Panopticism," 497.

Lucy is very evasive, often downplaying, or downright hiding information from the reader. This lays the foundation for her apparent lack of any form of distinguishable identity. All the other characters have distinct and identifiable markers, but this does not seem to apply to Lucy. Because she controls the narrative, she is our guide through her story, and will show us as much or as little as she wishes. The usual assumption is that the narrator will present only relevant material and information for the progression of the plot and character development; however, it becomes clear that Lucy conceals information that would be deemed important, only to reveal it later, such as her recognizing Dr. John as Graham Bretton.[42] Lucy's intentional elusiveness is important to the discussion, because it adds to the exploration of her gaze as well as her reaction to the gaze(s) placed on her. Due to Lucy's lack of her own (obvious) identity, she becomes "a blank screen on which others project their view of her."[43] Every character has their own opinion of her, depending on their own identity and worldview:

> What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature – adventurous, indocile, and audacious.[44]

As stated by Elizabeth K. Haller, "[t]he concept of perception versus reality obscures Lucy's view of others, and it equally obscures how others view Lucy."[45] Thus, both Lucy's identity and her observations are not as clear as one would normally assume, as they are both presented by a narrator who continually proves herself to be unreliable, through her persistent unwillingness to present all (relevant) information to the reader. This information is edited by Lucy, making her the ruler of its relevancy to the story as a whole. Brontë seems to have purposely created such a significant gap between Lucy's and the reader's understanding of relevancy. As readers, most of the information Lucy elides or delays relating creates a disconnect between her and her audience. Our image of Lucy is never clear; and, by the end of the novel, nothing has truly changed in our

[42] Brontë, *Villette*, 174-175.
[43] Mary Jacobus, "The Buried Letter: Feminism and Romanticism in *Villette*," in *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (New York: Routledge, 2012. Vital Source Bookshelf), paragraph 3: *Displacement*.
[44] Brontë, *Villette*, 301.
[45] Elizabeth K. Haller, "Perception and the Suppression of Identity in *Villette*," *Brontë Studies* 35, no. 2 (2010): 149.

perception of her. Lucy hides behind these roles and attributes that are projected onto her, as well as her highly edited narrative, using them as a protective cloak for her true nature. Many critics believe her 'identity' to remain the same throughout the novel, however, as Haller remarks, Lucy never really expresses her true self, thus it is difficult to fully determine whether she has undergone a change or not.[46] What we *do* see is Lucy altering how much of her elusive identity she chooses to share, and her slow shedding of her multiple personae. This new path is integral in our understanding of Lucy as a woman and a character. The focus on Lucy's identity, or lack thereof, has been prevalent. Yet, there has been little discussion about how the projection of identity on Lucy exemplifies the descriptive power of the gaze; other people's perception of her is strong enough to physically shape different identities within Lucy. As much as she attempts to present herself a different way, Lucy's 'blank screen' allows us to understand how subjective the gaze is, as each person who looks at Lucy sees a completely different woman based on their own perception of reality.

Haller's fascinating interpretation of the scene between Lucy and M. Paul, in which she is asked to play the fop – a part designed for a man – in the vaudeville show at the fête merits further analysis.[47] The usual interpretation of this scene is that of Lucy breaking assigned gender norms by playing a man's part, or by expressing her hidden and repressed sexuality.[48] Haller's focus is on the clothes meant for the fop role, rather than the role itself. From the garments presented to her by M. Paul, she chooses only a selection, stating that she does not "object to some of them, but [she] won't have them all."[49] To Haller, the clothes that Lucy chooses to wear for *her* role represent the attributes bestowed upon her by her onlookers, which she has accepted in her multi-faceted portrayal of herself.[50] Lucy's persona is a mosaic of all the roles society has forced upon her, each piece representing the attributes she has accepted as her own. This interpretation is particularly intriguing because it places Lucy in a liminal state; she floats in between the fully conforming, ideal Victorian woman, and the non-conformist who challenges the normative rule she is under, never really belonging to either. Lucy thus breaks with both

[46] Haller, "Perception," 158.
[47] Brontë, *Villette*, 133-140.
[48] Robin R. Warhol, "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36, no. 4 (Autumn, 1996): 869.
[49] Brontë, *Villette*, 139.
[50] Haller, "Perception," 157.

conventions, carving out a completely unique path for herself, forging her own singular identity in the process.

Throughout *Villette,* Lucy's inability to identify with others and find solace in their company leads to her life being led more alone than with others. She denies herself the true company of others by hiding, proclaiming that she "shall share no man's or woman's life in this world," believing to only "have one friend of my own but am not sure; and till I *am* sure, I live solitary.'"[51] Her choice to be secluded from others is entirely her own. It does, however, mirror Brontë's own feelings of isolation at Madame Heger's pensionnat, creating another autobiographical link within the novel. Due to the language barrier and cultural differences, the two Brontë sisters – Charlotte herself, and Emily – kept to themselves most of the time. Upon their arrival, they were deemed "wild and scared-looking, with strange, odd, insular ideas about dress."[52] This mirrors Lucy's arrival in Villette at the beginning of the novel; but, unlike her real-life counterpart, Lucy does become more at home with her surroundings:

> For a long time the fear of seeming singular scared me away; but by degrees, as people became accustomed to me and my habits, and to such shades of peculiarity as were ingrained in my nature – shades certainly not striking enough to interest, and perhaps not prominent enough to offend, but born in and with me, and no more to be parted with than my identity.[53]

Jacobus claims that Lucy's acts of comparing herself with other women stems from her attempting to find her own identity, but that she fails in this endeavor.[54] In each woman, she hopes to find something similar in herself, but this never happens. Thus, Lucy is forced to find solace in herself and her own being. She is aided in her discovery of self by M. Paul and Paulina, but it is her lack of a true equal that ultimately forces her to come to grips with her own identity. However, this identity is never truly presented to the readers, or many of the other characters, but is rather something that Lucy keeps to herself. That does not detract from the journey Lucy ventures on in the search for a sense of self. It *does* make her a wilier, and more elusive, protagonist and narrator.

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[51] Brontë, *Villette*, 425.
[52] Gaskell, *The Life*, 176-177.
[53] Brontë, *Villette*, 108.
[54] Jacobus, "The Buried Letter," paragraph 8: *Mirror, mirror…*

Unlike the other characters in *Villette*, Lucy manages to evade the controlling nature of Madame Beck's gaze. However, she does not manage to do so "[b]ecause of her goodness and irreproachable character," as is claimed by Jung.[55] It is true that Madame Beck struggles to maintain any semblance of control over Lucy; however, this struggle is not due to the supposed goodness of Lucy's character. Jung's belief seems to align with Madame Beck's: if there is no obvious bad behavior, Lucy's character must be of good nature. Neither of them account for there being any hidden elements, which is somewhat odd, seeing as Madame Beck seems to value truth. Madame Beck's modus operandi is the collection of information and using said information against her targets, and this is where she falls short in her attempts to control Lucy. Due to her elusiveness, Lucy's weaknesses are difficult to discern and are thus unexploitable. Throughout the novel, Lucy frequently proves to be overly judgmental, and exhibits unkind behavior towards those around her. Madame Beck, not being privy to this information due to her lack of access to the scenarios where they take place, as well as Lucy's own thoughts and narrative, is fooled by Lucy's well-constructed façade and thus judges her on what she believes to be the truth. Thus, Madam Beck falls into the trap of believing the information she has been presented regarding Lucy's character. As we have seen throughout *Villette*, Lucy is a master of disguise and subterfuge. She chooses not to project any facets of her true identity to Madame Beck, either due to a lack of trust in Madame Beck or in herself. Lucy is both highly insecure in herself and masterfully talented in keeping *that* self private. Ultimately, Lucy ends up performing what is expected of her by projecting said expectations, proving that the gaze is not as elusive as Lucy and how ingrained it is in the societal fabric.

1.3 Coquette or Angel? The Subjectivity of Gender Performance

> One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, physical or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilisation as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called female.[56]

[55] Jung, "Curiosity," 169.
[56] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage, 2011), 293.

In addition to a plethora of gazes, *Villette* is rife with performances, some more subtle than others. In their own ways, Lucy Snowe, Paulina Home, and Ginevra Fanshawe perform their gender through the lens of patriarchy. As mentioned earlier, gender performativity is an important aspect of *Villette* that merits further examination. Butler explains that "gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender."[57] Gender is socially constructed and purely performative; it has no true meaning and is highly affected by ideology. Genders are "neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity."[58] Because gender is a constructed concept, it is extremely subjective and susceptible to manipulation. Just as with gender roles today, Victorian-era perceptions of gender were highly affected by the prevailing ideology, which was based on strongly patriarchal and sexist beliefs. Therefore, drawing a link between Butler's theory of gender performativity and Foucault's panoptical theory is not as far-fetched as it might seem. They are quite entwined, with the notion of self-policing being a tool of manipulation that is used to integrate women into the false sense of womanhood and female identity. The constant gaze put on women creates a real, tangible threat of severe repercussions if any transgressions occur. Women end up performing societal expectations rather than expressing their true self, thus ultimately oppressing themselves.

Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe stand as examples of two of the most common roles for women: the domestic angel and the coquette, respectively. The concept of the angel in the house originated in Coventry Patmore's titular narrative poem and has gone on to be integral to the understanding of Victorian gender roles, symbolizing the epitome of Victorian ideals of womanhood and female sexuality. A 'proper' woman is to be pure, chaste, submissive, graceful, and compliant. She is there to lift the man up, to make *him* great.[59] This comes at the cost of herself, and she is to take joy in this degradation: "MAN must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure."[60] This aligns with Paulina's character, as she is seen catering to the needs of the men around her, specifically her father and Graham. According to Haller, Paulina is "a girl

[57] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 328.
[58] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 329.
[59] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 22-23.
[60] Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1863), book 1, canto IX, prelude, stanza 1, line 1 and 2.

enveloped in the being of another."[61] With each person she meets, with each set of eyes that behold her, she changes to fulfill their needs. She is a chameleon of identity presentation – excellent at adapting to her surroundings, with her own person merging with those around her.[62] Lucy describes Paulina as having:

> different moods for different people. With her father she really was still a child, or child-like, affectionate, merry, and playful. With me she was serious, and as womanly as thought and feeling could make her. With Mrs. Bretton she was docile and reliant, but not expansive. With Graham she was shy, at present very shy; at moments she tried to be cold; on occasion she endeavoured to shun him.[63]

In the introduction to the reissued edition of *Villette* (2008), Tim Dolin states that many interpretations of the novel describe Polly (young Paulina) as "an exaggerated version of the fetishized domestic woman of Victorian middle-class sexual ideology."[64] At an early age, she has already been integrated into the patriarchal system, and she plays her role to her best ability. On the surface, she seems to be the perfect little child, behaving exactly as she is expected to. However, this is not the case, according to Dolin. He claims that little Polly rather represents the women who struggle to live up to the ideals of the angel in the house.[65] At the beginning of the novel, we see Polly perform her 'womanly' duties; but we also become aware that she is struggling with them. She sits "silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly" at her toy workbox, pricking her fingers to the point of bloodshed hemming a handkerchief.[66] I agree with Dolin; yet Polly does not seem to struggle with her part for long, establishing the controlling power of the gaze. The next time we see her, as a young adult, Paulina knows exactly how to play the role of the angel. Through constant "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires," Paulina creates the "illusion of interior and organizing gender core," with this illusion being "maintained for the purposes of regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality."[67] Paulina chooses the way she presents her identity based on what she was taught from a young age, led by the false beliefs and understandings of femininity and gender roles passed on to her through her family. This is especially apparent in her familial structure.

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[61] Haller, "Perception," 151.
[62] Haller, "Perception," 151.
[63] Brontë, *Villette*, 299.
[64] Dolin, introduction, xxiv.
[65] Dolin, introduction, xxiv.
[66] Brontë, *Villette*, 15.
[67] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 329.

Paulina was brought up by her father, Mr. Home, after the death of her mother during Paulina's formative years. Mrs. Home was deemed a "giddy, careless woman" who was an unfit mother, alluded to by Mrs. Bretton stating that young Paulina was better off without such influences.[68] Paulina is watched over after the death of her mother, in hopes that she "will not be like her mama; as silly and frivolous a little flirt as ever sensible man was weak enough to marry."[69] Through the constant supervision of her father, she expels whatever coquettish remnants her mother might have bestowed upon her, remaining demure and 'womanly.' At this point, her adaption to her surroundings is no longer a conscious act, but rather something that has become ingrained in her being. She is tangled so far into the web of gender performance that she is unaware of her own oppression.

While Lucy and Paulina engage in gender performance, to varying degrees, Ginevra, according to Haller, remains herself throughout the novel; she never actually changes her identity for anyone, with Lucy being the only one who truly sees her for who she is. Everyone else "view[s] her as they choose to see her."[70] I agree with this interpretation to some degree; Ginevra does not seem to change her identity all that much depending on her company, excluding her suitors. In these cases, she does seem to alter her behavior; however, it seems to be more a variant of her core identity rather than a role that she puts on. Lucy, meanwhile, does not play the roles others attribute to her, but rather hides behind them. To some degree, Ginevra is impervious to the gaze that is supposed to wrangle her into submission. Unlike Paulina and Lucy, who shy away from attention and excessive gazes, Ginevra Fanshawe seems to revel in them. As the novel's ultimate coquette, she does everything in her power to gain constant male attention. Throughout *Villette,* she is flirty, vain, and selfish, and seems very happy in her way of life. Ginevra is aware of the multiple interpretations of her character but does not seem to mind nor try to conform to them. In many ways, she is more rebellious than Lucy, and she manages to stay true to herself.

Christina Crosby states that Graham and Paulina "are the only major characters who stay in place, fixed on either side of the sexual antithesis."[71] Paulina's entire character arc revolves

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[68] Brontë, *Villette*, 6.
[69] Brontë, *Villette*, 7.
[70] Haller, "Perception," 155.
[71] Christina Crosby, "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24, no. 4 (Autumn: 1984): 710.

around Graham – her beginning and end are dependent on him. Her relationship with Graham is highly normative. Ultimately, Paulina is handed from one man to another, reinforcing the marriage trope and showing how deeply ingrained heteronormative and patriarchal structures were in Victorian society and literature:

> Its true inmate is not the satanic rebel and fallen angel, but the angelic, spiritualised Paulina – whose surname, appropriately, is Home. By marrying her (it is she whom he rescues from the threatened conflagration in the theatre) Graham Bretton ensures the continuation of the status quo.[72]

Paulina becomes the symbol of the angel in the house, the pure and perfect woman. However, this plotline is used to emphasize and criticize the role women had in Victorian society, rather than to reinforce normative tropes. To Lucy, Paulina is the prime example of a 'proper' woman, yet there are contradictions in Lucy's attitudes towards her:

> As to Paulina, I observed her that her little character never properly came out, except with young Bretton. As she got settled, and accustomed to the house, she proved tractable enough with Mrs. Bretton; but she would sit on a stool at that lady's feet all day long, learning her task, or sewing, or drawing figures with a pencil on a slate, and never kindling once to originality, or showing a single gleam of the peculiarities of her nature. I ceased to watch her under such circumstances: *she was not interesting*.[73]

We are led to believe, by her demeanor towards Paulina, that Lucy endorses her conformist behavior. However, as we see in this quotation, Lucy does not deem anything Paulina does that is understood as 'womanly' of any interest to her, since it does not provide her with any voyeuristic gratification. In this paradoxical display of attitudes, we see Lucy both approve and condemn Paulina's behavior, but only when it is relevant to her own pleasure. She withdraws her own gaze when her subject is no longer of interest to her, only gazing when it does something 'interesting,' according to her standards – yet this is exactly what she chastises Ginevra for doing. Lucy is allowed (by herself) to observe Paulina whenever she feels like it and wishes Paulina to act accordingly by doing things Lucy wants to observe her doing. However, Ginevra, doing the exact same thing but to men, is deemed coquettish and 'unwomanly.' Thus, to Lucy,

[72] Jacobus, "The Buried Letter," paragraph 6, *Heimlich/unheimlich.*
[73] Brontë, *Villette*, 23-24 (italics added).

she herself is the only one who is permitted to enact her gaze on other women and to 'make' them conform to her voyeuristic wishes.

Paulina's placement and value within the schematic of domestic ideals becomes contradictory based on the gaze beholding her. In *Villette*, Brontë uses the contemporary reader's expectations against them by contrasting Paulina's behavior with that of the other female characters; the usual tropes of the Victorian novel are used against the reader, subverting their expectations. While Paulina's behavior is not explicitly criticized, it is not celebrated either. Paulina has conformed to the normative societal gaze and settled down as the 'perfect' wife. Her marriage with Graham is highly normative, presenting the reader with the expected end to their marriage plot. However, according to Maria Ioannou, this union is "shown as ideal for the repressed heroine herself and the larger society, but it is not ideal in the novel as a whole," and that Graham only chose Paulina due to her timid and angel-like nature, as well as her dowry.[74] In many ways, both Graham and Paulina take advantage of the other in order to remain within the hegemony of Victorian society. Where Brontë subverts both genre and gender conventions is in the complete elision of Paulina from the narrative after her marriage to Graham. The narrative has thus reinforced Lucy's gaze upon Paulina, rather than society's. Lucy's gaze condemns Paulina's heteronormativity at this point in the narrative, while the societal gaze would praise Paulina for her domestic 'accomplishments,' and the great performance of her gender.

As discussed, Lucy omits a lot of details from her narration, and she has stated herself that she stops gazing once she loses interest in it. In Lucy's summary of Paulina and Graham's relationship and life, Graham is described positively, with emphasis on his achievements. Subsequent of their marriage, his "virtue ripened; he rose in intellectual refinement, he won in moral profit."[75] Paulina's accomplishments, on the other hand, are simply reduced to those pertaining to her husband: "Bright, too, was the destiny of his sweet wife. She kept her husband's love, she aided in his progress – of his happiness she was the corner stone."[76] Some critics believe this to be because of Lucy's hidden feelings for Graham throughout the first half the novel, or Paulina simply not staying in touch.[77] However, I would argue that it is because

[74] Maria Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra:' Marriage Plotting, Sub-Plotting and the Spectacle of Beauty in *Villette*'s Economy of Female Worth," *Brontë Studies* 40, no. 3 (2015): 224.
[75] Brontë, *Villette*, 436.
[76] Brontë, *Villette*, 436.
[77] Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 224.

Paulina conformed to the societal pressure enforced by the gaze and is thus reduced to almost nothing, losing her value in Lucy's eyes, being unceremoniously excluded from Lucy's narrative.

Ginevra, existing on the opposite end of the sexual spectrum as Paulina, is not punished for her so-called transgressions of gender normativity, showing the cracks in Victorian gender roles in *Villette.* Ginevra has denied the Victorian ideals she is expected to live up to, and the reader is expecting her to be punished for her coquettish ways.[78] Lucy even addresses the expectations the reader might have based on the established schemata of *Villette*'s panoptic structure, stating: "the reader will no doubt expect to hear that she came finally to bitter expiation of her youthful levities. Of course, a large share of suffering lies in reserve for her future?"[79] In this case, society's and Lucy's gaze are based on the same gender ideology. Not only does Lucy yet again become contradictory in her cherry-picking of Victorian ideals, but she is also in fact responsible for the questioning of Victorian domestic ideals through her continuing her communication with Ginevra, the flirt, and not Paulina, who conformed to Lucy's and society's hegemonic gaze. Ginevra's marriage with Alfred de Hamal differs extensively from that of Paulina and Graham, but it seems more genuine, as shown through Ginevra's continued correspondence with Lucy. In this marriage, Ginevra becomes the responsible one, shedding her frivolous nature in order to aid her more frivolous husband.[80] Their relationship is far from the Victorian ideal, turning matrimonial gender norms on their heads. In many ways, this might seem like a punishment; however, this is not the case. Ginevra is devoted to her husband and child, not due to conventions, but rather out of love. Despite their flaws, Ginevra and Alfred de Hamal seem to have an affectionate, solid marriage. In the end, Ginevra "had no notion of meeting any distress single-handed" and "on the whole, suffering as little as any human being I have ever known."[81] *Villette's* marriage sub-plots are more subversive than probably assumed at first glance, as they shed a light on Victorian ideals of domesticity and womanhood. This aspect of Lucy's gaze, as well as that of society is important to the discussion of Victorian gender norms because it shows that there are no absolutes, but rather that gender is subjective and a

[78] Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 224-225.
[79] Brontë, *Villette*, 476.
[80] Brontë, *Villette*, 477; Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 226.
[81] Brontë, *Villette*, 478.

personal form of expression. The novel shows that there is no true difference between the supposed angel and coquette, creating cracks in the foundation of Victorian gender roles.

1.4 The Beholders of the Gaze

Something very prevalent in *Villette* is the sheer number of eyes that are always surveilling; the gaze is everywhere. As mentioned, the town of Villette is a fully-fledged panopticon, and its inhabitants are simultaneously both the inmates and the guards, maintaining the 'order' they believe it needs. The pensionnat functions as a microcosm for the rest of the town, with Madame Beck working "within a structural framework of observational control and confession provided by the Catholic environment of Villette."[82] This form of environment forces others to spy on their neighbors and friends to make sure that they are behaving correctly. Towards the end of the novel, Lucy goes to the town fair at night, under the influence of drugs Madame Beck has given to her to make her sleep. They have the opposite effect, however, and Lucy wanders off into the night on a journey of self-discovery. This is the only occurrence in the novel where she is truly unseen by the eyes that judge her, but this is not done easily. Lucy must wear a disguise to hide: her garden costume, hat, and large shawl.[83] She wanders the town in search of the park; and, during this journey, she sees acquaintances and friends by whom she passes unseen, giving her a "strange pleasure to follow these friends viewlessly, and [Lucy] *did* follow them […]. [Lucy] watched them alight […] amidst new and unanticipated splendors.[84] Because of her costume and the "motley crowd," Lucy is able to walk around completely free of gazes other than her own. [85] Paradoxically, she is able to function outside the panopticon in place to oppress her, by physically hiding herself. And it is *because* she is unseen that she can fully thrive in her own skin. Lucy is painfully aware of the gazes placed on her and manages to hide from them, but she is still not truly free. After this ordeal, Lucy "realizes that what she called 'Reason' is really repressive magic," and she "has emerged from the park a more integrated person."[86] Lucy's 'Reason' is really just the interpellated Victorian ideology forced upon her through constant surveillance. Her solitary, invisible walk through the panoptic macrocosm that is Villette forces

[82] Jung, "Curiosity," 164.
[83] Brontë, *Villette*, 451.
[84] Brontë, *Villette*, 452.
[85] Brontë, *Villette*, 452.
[86] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 436.

Lucy to confront the restrictive hold society has on her and the power that the gaze truly has. She is thus able to fully break from the chains Madame Beck, and society as a whole, has attempted to put on her.

Due to Lucy's invisibility from the public gaze, she is able to transgress more than the other female characters in *Villette*. Lucy's position in society gives her an advantage that is not available to women such as Paulina, who is more tethered to her social standing. Lucy does not conform to the established form of femininity in terms of clothing, using her drab clothing and lack of attention to appearances as camouflage, being seen as "inoffensive as a shadow" by Graham Bretton.[87] Ioannou states that *Villette* "makes a careful distinction between women who have the liberty to deviate from patriarchal ideals."[88] Lucy is never presented as "an icon of beauty, a sign that automatically signifies 'Woman' to be viewed, to be the center of attention."[89] Thus, she is able to slip through the cracks and be left to her own devices. Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe are not as lucky. These women are beautiful and feminine and are never able to escape the male gaze that ultimately imprisons them. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Paulina functions as a double for Lucy, showcasing the opposite attributes to Lucy's repressed self. She is "Lucy Snowe born under a lucky star."[90] Paulina is attractive and born into privilege, as is Ginevra, but this privilege is more constraining than it seems on the surface. Lucy, on the other hand, through vague explanations, is revealed to be quite unprivileged, especially compared to Paulina and Ginevra. Due to this she has a spiritual privilege, as she is not as confined by her appearance as her counterparts.

As discussed earlier, Lucy often comes across as hypocritical and dichotomous, and this is most apparent in her attitudes towards gazing. While showing a clear resentment of others watching her, *she* still maintains her voyeuristic tendencies. Under Madame Beck's panoptic rule over her pensionnat, Lucy fares quite well. In the beginning, she is not too opposed to Madame Beck's methods, although not completely in agreement either. In many ways, she seems unsure of how she feels, even contradicting herself at times: "The end was not bad, but the means were hardly fair or justifiable," continuing, "madame's system was not wholly bad – let me do her

[87] Brontë, *Villette*, 317.
[88] Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 215.
[89] Karen Lawrence, "The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42, no. 4 (1988): 450.
[90] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 404, 427.

justice."[91] She is just as complicit in the perpetuation of the normative rule of Villette. Her objections to the 'accepted' structure and rule of things are not challenged until it personally affects her: "Had [Madame Beck] creased one solitary article, I own I should have felt much greater difficulty in forgiving her; but finding all straight and orderly, I said, 'Let bygones be bygones. *I* am unharmed: why should I bear malice.'"[92] She does not object to Madame Beck's methods until she herself has something to hide. As with so many women who benefit from patriarchal structures, she stays silent until it causes issues for her. She has accepted the status quo and thrives within it. Lucy is the most manipulative character in the novel, and she uses the pre-existing system of gazing and surveillance to satisfy her voyeuristic needs. Throughout the entire novel, she strives to conceal as much of herself as possible but takes great satisfaction in observing others and their secrets, not understanding that it is exactly this gaze from which she is, ultimately, hiding. Lucy "has 'internalized' Madame's techniques of surveillance, and the observation of others ultimately culminates in a recognition of the anatomy of her own real, rather than the externally constructed, personality that is witnessed by Madame."[93]

Throughout *Villette*, Lucy both challenges and affirms normative gender roles, making her an intriguing and unusual heroine. She seems adamant in being independent and having her own distinct identity yet seems to still subscribe to most of the normative notions of gender roles, especially regarding 'acceptable' feminine behavior. She has a very strict and narrow understanding of womanhood, with the demure Paulina being her prime example. Lucy is quite conservative, deeming any flamboyant behavior unsavory and unnecessary, and often shows her lack of faith in women. Very few women live up to Lucy's expectations of womanhood, and she is quite harsh and scathing in her remarks about the women around her:

> I was not accustomed to find in women or girls any power of self-control, or strength of self-denial. As far as I knew them, the chance of a gossip about their usually trivial secrets, their often very washy and paltry feelings, was a treat not to be readily foregone.[94]

She seems to find joy, and a form of moral superiority, by comparing herself to other women, highlighted by her dislike for their attributes. In many ways, Lucy shows part of her identity

[91] Brontë, *Villette*, 69, 73.
[92] Brontë, *Villette*, 120 (italics added).
[93] Jung, "Curiosity," 168.
[94] Brontë, *Villette*, 289.

through her refusal to be seen and understood as 'other women' are. However progressive a female protagonist she is seen as by many critics, "Lucy Snowe curiously identifies with patriarchy on the issues of physical appearance, beauty and appropriate feminine demeanour," and regardless of her "disagreement with broad patriarchal ideals, when it comes to the nature of womanhood, Lucy will always condemn flirty Ginevra in favour of the demure and asexual Paulina."[95] Lucy holds repression and self-control as virtues, rather than hindrances, to the development of (sexual) identity. Ginevra's flirtatiousness is harshly criticized by Lucy because it goes against everything she has been manipulated into believing. Ioannou claims that, regarding romantic intentions towards men, "there is no distinction between the disciplinary male gaze and Lucy's."[96] Lucy is very set in her ways and is yet another example of how the Victorian ideal of the female has interpellated Lucy as a subject.

Due to Lucy's (unreliable) narrative, we as readers are only privy to her point of view; we only see the other characters in *Villette* through her eyes. Indeed, Lucy may have the most oppressive gaze in the entire novel. This applies more importantly to the female characters, as "[n]o other woman in the novel has any identity except as Lucy herself bestows it. The absent centre exerts a centripetal force on the other characters, making them all facets of the consciousness whose passions animate them."[97] We understand characters such as Madame Beck, Ginevra, and Paulina through Lucy and her subjective worldview. As such, we only get to see them through Lucy's oppressive gaze. Through conditioning and circumstance, Lucy has become a repressed woman, and thus reacts to female behavior that opposes her own with hostility. Her "repression is a response to a society cruelly indifferent to women;" her condemning of other women is solely a defense mechanism put in place to make her feel more special and superior.[98]

> *Villette* shows that attacks on patriarchy were not monolithic, and were presumed, by the conventional mind, to be carried out by a specific type of woman only. What is more, this conventionality was shared by the women themselves, as shown clearly by Lucy's identification with patriarchal discipline regarding the behaviour expected from a beautiful young woman.[99]

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[95] Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 219.
[96] Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 219.
[97] Jacobus, "The Buried Letter," paragraph 8: *Mirror, mirror…*
[98] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 401.
[99] Ioannou, "'I am the picture of Aunt Ginevra,'" 216.

While she does act in a non-conformist way in many aspects of her identity, Lucy still adheres quite closely to the patriarchal understanding of femininity. Butler states that "disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain."[100] Any disruptions in gender, specifically the understanding and performance of female gender, is deemed a threat to the patriarchy – control is harder to sustain if there is any instability. So many women are unable to fully escape the male gaze because of the damage it will do to their everyday lives. Beauvoir states that "[r]efusing to be the Other, refusing complicity with man, would mean renouncing all the advantages an alliance with the superior caste confers on them."[101] Women, just as any other human being, crave stability; thus, they end up reinforcing the tools of their own oppression under the belief that their life will be better. Lucy describes her life as being a shipwreck where "the ship was lost, the crew perished," where she for a long time felt like "a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbor still as glass."[102] This imagery is used to describe her unnamed family tragedies, and through these descriptions it is not hard to understand her reluctance to let go of the few privileges she does have, such as the stability she has gained in Villette. The progression of the novel exemplifies that "escape becomes increasingly difficult as women internalize the destructive strictures of patriarchy."[103] Women have slowly incorporated misogynistic ideologies into their identity in order to feel some semblance of control over their lives; but ironically, it is this form of suppression and self-control that takes that control away from them.

1.5 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Brontë's *Villette* perfectly exemplifies the enforcement of the panoptic structure and its effect on those living within it. Foucault's panopticism, combined with Butler's theory of gender performativity, is a useful tool for understanding how women behave and what affects that behavior. Together, these theories give incredible insight into forced normative behavior and allow us to explore how the female characters react to, and are affected by, the constant

[100] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 328.
[101] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 10.
[102] Brontë, *Villette*, 35.
[103] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 400.

surveillance in their life. The Victorian era was rife with self-suppression and self-denial, which mirrors the effect of the panoptic prison. As discussed in this chapter, the gaze and surveillance permeate the narrative of *Villette*. All the female characters are entangled in the panoptic structure of Victorian society and are thus both the oppressed and their own oppressor. The novel exemplifies how women have been implanted with the idea, through interpellation as subjects into the Victorian ideology, that surveillance and constant regulatory gazing is integral to their life and the only way to make sure everyone maintains the ideals imposed upon them. The gaze in *Villette* takes on this regulatory role, most notably in the shapes of Madame Beck and M. Paul, but it also emphasizes the complexity of Lucy Snowe's gaze. As the narrator of the novel, we as readers get to see her gazes firsthand, and they manifest themselves differently from those of the other characters in the novel. Although, both Madame Beck and M. Paul use their gazes to force people to conform, in fear of punishment, Lucy's gaze seems to go almost unnoticed and plays a different part than that of either Madame Beck or M. Paul. As a character, Lucy does challenge gender norms, but she also heavily reinforces them, as we see through her gaze. While often shunning Victorian gender norms, she seems to attempt to reinforce them in other characters, such as Paulina Home and Ginevra Fanshawe. While both women act in accordance with established gender norms, neither of them, especially Ginevra, live up to Lucy's expectation of womanhood. The novel uses Lucy's paradoxical presentations of the two women to shed light on the complexity of the concept of femininity: how it is rooted in ideology and is very subjective.

As I have argued, Lucy's gaze is the most oppressive one in *Villette* because it informs the representation of all the other characters in the novel. We see the narrative through her eyes; thus, all of her narrative is tainted by her own ideology and preconceived notions of gender roles and femininity. While Lucy is judgmental towards the other women in the novel, she seems to be unaware of her own privilege. She is a lot freer to transgress and shape her own gender identity because of her appearance and social standing. This idea will be furthered in the next chapter, examining the gender identity of Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*. The gaze does affect Lucy as a character as well, as her reaction to it differs from the others in the novel. While some take great strides to be the center of attention, such as Ginevra, Lucy hides herself throughout the narrative. Lucy is aware of her own judgmental gaze, and thus does not want to be subjected to it, as she subjects others to its scathing nature.

2. Women Deconstructed: *The Woman in White* and the Sensational Gaze

The Woman in White established a new understanding of femininity while simultaneously falling prey to the male gaze. In our very first moments with Marian Halcombe, we see her through the eyes of Walter Hartright:

> The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck by the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude. Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness; her waist, perfection in the eyes of a man […] The easy elegance of ever movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly.[1]

Walter's gaze is highly descriptive and detailed as it thoroughly focuses on Marian's body. He is highly judgmental of her physical appearance, taking his voyeuristic pleasure as far as he can. To Walter, her body is a commodity for him, as a man, to enjoy visually. *The Woman in White* exemplifies how easily women are sexualized by men, but also how that gaze changes once the women being gazed at is not conventionally beautiful, as we see in Walter's reaction to Marian's face:

> The lady is dark. […] The lady is young. […] The lady is ugly! Never has the old conventional maxim, that Nature cannot err, more flatly contradicted – never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startingly belied by the face and head that crowned it.[2]

Marian's face confounds Walter, as his expectations of her face being beautiful based on her 'womanly' figure are shattered. The scene builds up to this revelation, taking the reader on the same journey of discovery as Walter, and represents the crux of Wilkie Collins's subversion of Victorian gender expectations, exploration of female sexuality, and the notion of femininity.
In this chapter, I will argue that Marian represents a different incarnation of femininity, and that her presentation of femininity functions as a challenge to established Victorian gender norms. Victorian femininity has always been established through the male gaze, and this chapter aims to break free from this notion and show that there is more than one explicit way of expressing

[1] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 31.
[2] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 31-32.

femininity. This chapter will further argue that Collins uses the angel in the house, in the form of Laura Fairlie, as a contrast to Marian, and uses Laura to critique Victorian domesticity. Throughout the novel, Laura's identity is non-existent, representing the lack of value Collins places on the domestic ideals of Victorian society. I will also argue that Marian's existence outside the gender binary frees her from the sexualization and enforced performativity of the gaze.

In *The Woman in White*, Collins uses irony to challenge gender norms. The 'hero' of the novel and the 'pure angel' are mostly useless throughout the novel, while the unprivileged heroine is the most resourceful. The usual tropes of character development are flipped on their head and replaced with something more exciting. According to Susan Balée, *The Woman in White* creates a "devaluation of the angel in the house […] by contrasting her with the strong-minded old maid," with Marian taking on this role. Marian's function is thus to uproot the perceived notions of femininity and replace them with a new and more inclusive gender identity.[3] Marian embodies both feminine and masculine attributes, making for a unique heroine from a gender perspective. Laura, on the other hand, is described as a damsel simply because that is what Walter wants. His need for a female companion, and something to prove his own masculinity and ableness, causes him to form his narrative to fit his agenda. "The observation and interpretation of appearances are merely used in this novel for the self-justification of their narrators."[4] Nothing that is related in the narrative can be taken at face value, as each character has their own motives and agendas – even our protagonists. Thus, Laura's entire existence is affected and formed (mostly) through Walter's gaze. Marian is also complicit in this: she does not think much of women. She sees her sister's feminine traits as weaknesses and those 'weaknesses' inform her narrative. Ultimately, they too are responsible for the erasure of Laura's identity, as she is unable to speak for herself.

In her monograph, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, Lyn Pykett discusses how the Victorians saw women and understood femininity and womanhood. She states that 'proper' femininity involved passivity, modesty, innocence, and obliviousness regarding anything sexual.[5] In other

[3] Susan Balée, "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women: The Case of Marian Halcombe," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 20 (1992): 199.
[4] Henderson, "Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde," 8.
[5] Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15-16.

words, women were simply empty vessels to be used and controlled by men, lacking any form of autonomy. The polar opposite was the woman that did not conform to these norms set by society, and "denotes the domestic ideal's dangerous other."[6] These women were a threat to the status quo, and there were numerous attempts to keep them in order. Marian Halcombe represents the 'improper' feminine: through this character, Collins presents a new blueprint for the Victorian heroine, blurring the lines between feminine and masculine. The analysis of Marian's character is important to gender discourse because she is so different to the canonic Victorian female heroines, such as the titular Jane Eyre, *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea Brooke, or *Vanity Fair*'s Emmy Sedley and Becky Sharp. The notions of detection and surveillance permeate *The Woman in White*, as the "sensation novel both fed on and fed nineteenth-century fears that one's respectable-looking neighbours concealed some awful secret or crime in their past or present."[7] The use of surveillance and eavesdropping become important for the narrative of the novel and is further problematized and complicated by the use of several narrators.

In this chapter, I will explore the notion of Victorian femininity and womanhood, and how they are represented in the different female characters in *The Woman in White*. As a continuation of the gaze presented in the previous chapter, this one will build upon the enforcement of gender roles through the gaze and combine this with the sexual aspects of the male gaze in order to explore its effect on Marian and Laura. I will combine Foucault's ideas of panopticism with those of Beauvoir, and her extensive exploration into womanhood and femininity from her novel *The Second Sex* and show how a female identity is formed by the gaze. The inclusion of sensation fiction in this discussion is also important because of its progressive representation of women and swapping of gender tropes. I will continue the analysis with exploring how the gazes in the novel are different from each other, as well as having different motives than those found in *Villette*. Laura functions as a critique of domestic ideals as well as highlighting the struggles of women who are fixed by the gaze, and how that, in turn, creates a mental prison guarded by the gazes of others. Further, I will examine the repercussions of those women who are left without a voice or a gaze of their own through the oppression of surveillance. Finally, I will investigate how Marian stands outside the confines placed on her by

[6] Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, 24.
[7] Lyn Pykett, "Collins and the Sensation Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 53.

society, and how her borderline existence frees her from the expectations society has placed on other women, such as her sister Laura. My arguments will build on Pykett's notion of the *improper feminine*, because it is so integral to the understanding of Marian as a woman and as a character. D. A. Miller and Leah Henderson's analyses of *The Woman in White* in terms of gender theory and the gaze are also important for understanding how the gaze is present in the novel. In each novel discussed in this thesis, the gaze presents itself differently, and affects different aspects of female life. Because she stands outside the sexual and gendered hegemony, Marian is much more liberated than her female counterparts. Marian is impervious to the oppressive male gaze due to her gender duality; she is unable to be confined by the conforming nature of the male gaze and is thus able to break free from the shackles that so strongly attempt to oppress her.

2.1 (Re)defining Womanhood

"No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself," writes Beauvoir.[8] Throughout *The Second Sex*, she details different understandings of this concept through various lenses, such as psychoanalysis, history, and mythology. The concept of the *Other*, which can refer to one or more people, is "rooted in the concepts of ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias."[9] This dynamic is constant and highly subjective. The role of the *One* is always placed on the subject(s) defining themselves, giving it them a sense of superiority and community. The placement of the One and the Other is relative depending on perspective, yet in terms of men and women it is absolute: men are the One, while women are always the Other.[10] Women are ultimately barred from having innate value and autonomy. In all other scenarios, a person can be both the One and the Other depending on circumstance. This way of understanding identity and the self in relation to others can also be understood as *intersectionality*. The term was coined by lawyer and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Crenshaw describes

[8] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 6.
[9] *Encyclopedia of Identity*, s.v. "Other, The," by Ronald L. Jackson II and Michael A. Hogg, accessed February 24, 2022, https://sk-sagepub-com.ezproxy.uio.no/reference/identity/n179.xml.
[10] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 7.

intersectionality as a method to prevent the theoretical erasure of Black women and the existing theoretical framework that "undermine[s] the efforts to broaden the feminist and antiracial analysis."[11] The term intersectionality comes from the intersections and connections of different aspects of identity that affect each other, such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. The issue Crenshaw has with a lot of feminist and racial theories is their *lack* of intersection, ultimately erasing the experiences of Black women because the "focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination."[12] Pykett's *'*improper' feminine becomes another subsection of woman as the Other, as it is being 'othered' by normative gender rule. Not only are these 'improper' women the Other to men, but they are also the Other to other women, placing them even further outside the hegemonic structure. The Victorian ideal of femininity was based on female submission and male dominance, idealizing any female behavior that hinted at weakness and vulnerability. Thus, this thesis will discuss the intersection of women, class, gender expectations, and non-conformity. In literature, as in society, Victorian femininity and the angel in the house were held as the norm, the ideal, and the 'improper' feminine was defined by its lack of similarity; it "does not simply denote what is represented but, more importantly, describes a mode of representation."[13] The improper women thus inhabited everything society deems inappropriate for any woman to exhibit.

Coventry Patmore's poem is exemplary of the angelic ideal of the Victorian woman, building on the preconceived notions of femininity set by Victorian society. Patmore describes the ideal woman thus: "Her disposition is devout, / Her countenance angelical; […] / Pure dignity, composure, ease […] / Her modesty, her chiefest grace, […] / How amiable and innocent / Her pleasure in her power to charm."[14] The angelic ideal, especially the one presented in literature, was based on what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call *the eternal feminine*. The eternal feminine consists of the notions of attributes that are fundamentally 'feminine,' and thus only inherently found in women; yet their only function is to make women more agreeable and

[11] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* no.1, article 8 (1989): 139-140.
[12] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection," 140.
[13] Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, 24-25.
[14] Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, book I, canto IV, preludes, stanza 1, line 11-12, 21, 25, 47-48.

compliant to men.[15] Throughout the Victorian era, a plethora of conduct books and monographs were produced in order to educate young women on correct behavior; to enforce the domestic ideal and subjugation of women. One such monograph was *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839) by Sarah Stickney Ellis, where she describes the domestic ideology that was so prevalent in Victorian society. She states that a "considerate woman therefore […] will look around her, and consider what is due to those whom Providence has placed within the sphere of her influence."[16] She is to be selfless and always in service of others, never herself. A woman's worth was thus rooted in her domestic abilities, and she often exhibited childlike behavior. Based on this description, *WW* has its perfect angel in the form of Laura Fairlie. Much like Patmore's angel, Laura is described as being a "fair, delicate girl" with "truthful, innocent blue eyes," and having a "childish earnestness."[17] She is demure, humble, and modest in her behavior, having "a natural delicacy of feeling and natural intensity of aversion to the slightest personal display of her own wealth."[18] Throughout the novel, she never acts in contradiction to this character, other than in brief moments in the company of her own sister, Marian. She is even so selfless as to go through with the marriage to Sir Percival because of a promise she made to her late father, who thoroughly wished for this match to take place, letting her own feelings for Walter remain unacted upon, ultimately sealing her own destiny.

The link between Foucault and Beauvoir might not be as apparent as it is with Butler or Mulvey, but the concepts of surveillance and gazes are still prevalent in the understanding of femininity. Beauvoir, much like Butler, believes that gender and femininity are something that is socially constructed, and that it has no inherent and concrete meaning due to this:

> But first, what is a woman? *'Tota mulier in utero*: she is a womb,' some say. Yet speaking of certain women, the experts proclaim, 'They are not women', even though they have a uterus like others. […] So not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity.[19]

[15] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 21, 23.
[16] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 169.
[17] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 50, 51.
[18] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 54.
[19] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

The construct of femininity was not created by women, but by men, who are seen as the original to which women are compared. However, the comparison is not a true one, as women are not judged equally with men. Men are always in the right "by virtue of being man," while women are "in the wrong" because they *are not men*.[20] As noted earlier, the panoptic structure permeated Victorian society: women were constantly surveilled by those around them, very often by other women. Foucault states that "[t]he practice of placing individuals under 'observation' is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures."[21] Unlike men, women are under constant scrutiny for their behavior, and this is thoroughly applicable to *WW*. As the plot progresses, our main characters, especially Marian, are under constant surveillance by Count Fosco and his wife.

The domestic feminine ideal was just another tool for the patriarchy to retain control over the women in Victorian society. As their oppression continued, women were relegated to the home, where they were told that they were in charge. Paradoxically, men held control over that sphere as well, only giving women a pseudo-control over the sliver of autonomy and authority that was 'given' to them. Thus, they were manipulated by society into believing that they held some form of power, when in fact it was quite the opposite. That is not to say that some women did not have emotional control over their husbands. However, this power did not fully lead to any true form of autonomy out in wider society; women were still very much under the control of hegemonic rule. The literary scene was also mostly dominated by men, who were thus able to further the Victorian domestic ideology to their readers, of which the majority were women.[22] With male authors having a control over the type of literature that was produced, it is important to note the importance of male writers that present their readers with complex heroines that challenged the status quo, such as Collins's Marian Halcombe.

The understanding of concepts such as virtue and modesty is so subjective that they are impossible to adhere to properly, thus creating cracks in the angelic façade of the Victorian domestic woman. Collins uses his female characters to explore the limitations and confines of Victorian gender roles and stereotypes. Laura is presented as the stereotypical angel of the house,

[20] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5.
[21] Foucault, "Panopticism," 507.
[22] Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 73-75.

yet she is not hailed as the standard for female conduct. Rather, it seems as though her character functions as a critique of the trope of female inadequacy and passivity:

> Mingling with the vivid impression produced by the charm of her fair face and head, her sweet expression, and her winning simplicity of manner, was another impression, which, in a shadowy way, suggested to me the idea of something wanting.[23]

Although to Walter Hartright, Laura Fairlie is a pure and demure woman, she is still not *perfect*: she is lacking something, suggesting that Collins did not believe this 'angel' to be substantial enough to form a *complete* woman. Collins's treatment of the angel in the house mirrors that of Lucy Snowe's. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lucy shuns Paulina from her narrative after she finishes her conformist arc by marrying Graham, thus no longer being of interest to Lucy. This view aligned with the shift in the understanding and subsequent criticism of Victorian gender roles during the 1840s and 50s.[24] Many conservatives, such as Ellis, believed there to no longer be any 'real' women left, as they started to veer from the domestic ideal they so deeply cherished.[25] Ellis relates that there are some struggles that women face in terms of the domestic ideal. She states that women "are told to be virtuous, and in order to be so, they are advised to be kind and modest, orderly and discreet. But," she continues, "few teachers, and fewer writers, condescend to take up the minutiae of every-day existence, so far as to explain in what distinct and individual actions such kindness, modesty, order, and discretion consist."[26] She continues her argument that those writers who would focus on these 'minutiae' are foolish in their endeavors and are only filling "a book with trifles," yet this is the purpose of her monograph.[27] Ellis's attempts at brushing over this issue fail, as she opens it up for further investigation. Her statements exemplify the issue with the Victorian domestic ideal, in that it is not founded in anything concrete.

[23] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 50.
[24] Harrison, "1848," 30.
[25] Ellis, *The Women of England*, 10-12.
[26] Ellis, *The Women of England*, 170.
[27] Ellis, *The Women of England*, 170-171.

2.2 Sensational Women

> The celebration of sensation […] merely *receives* it; the censure of sensation […] refuses to *read* it. In either case, sensation is felt to occupy a natural site entirely outside meaning, as though in the breathless body signification expired.[28]

As a genre, sensation fiction epitomized societal fears, yet managed to gain high popularity during its heyday. Collins had a prolific writing career, and *The Woman in White* is deemed to be the origin of the sensation novel.[29] Many of its critics saw the popular genre as a "morbid symptom of modernity;" and, in some sense, it was, as it "not only blurred or crossed boundaries of genre and material form, it also crossed over between different readerships and different social classes."[30] Sensation fiction's reliance on appealing to the emotions of its reader was not only its highest allure but also its most common critique. Its more subversive undertones, and overt intensity and suspense, made the more conservative readers uneasy, and they accused sensation fiction of being highly corruptive. Many of the plotlines and themes of sensation fiction were deemed unfit for women to read, such as murder, bigamy, madness, wrongful imprisonment, and amateur detective work, to name a few.[31] This was primarily due to women being deemed to be more sensitive to the material found in sensation fiction because of their lack of 'real' experiences, and many were worried that this would agitate "female readers into a sexualized frenzy of sorts."[32] Paradoxically, the genre as a whole was mostly written by female authors, and was aimed at a predominately female audience.[33] Thus, it is interesting to note that women made up the majority of the writers of this 'corruptive' genre, making the case for Victorian women not being as 'pure' and 'sexually inexperienced' as society might wish them to be.

Many of the heroines of sensation fiction were critiqued for lacking an interior life, yet this is what drew so many female readers to the genre. Gone was the loquacious and prosaic heroine; in her place was an outspoken woman of action.[34] Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe represent these forms of female characters respectively; however, Laura is so far removed from

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[28] D. A. Miller, "*Cage aux folles*: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," in *The Novel and the Police* (London: University of California Press, 1988), 147.
[29] Pykett, "Collins and the Sensation Novel," 50.
[30] Pykett, "Collins and the Sensation Novel," 51.
[31] Pykett, "Collins and the Sensation Novel," 50-51.
[32] Emily Allen, "Gender and Sensation," in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Pamela K. Gilbert (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 408.
[33] Allen, "Gender and Sensation," 402.
[34] Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, 48-49.

the narrative that she becomes passive and static throughout the entire novel. Laura is "every inch the proper woman […] her passive femininity is the sort of narrative blank over which other people compose it. […] Marian Halcombe, is, on the other hand, a striking presence and a fascinating hybrid: her feminine grace is coupled with masculine rationality and drive."[35] According to Tara MacDonald, sensation novels "frequently suggest that women's identities are more fragmented than those of their male counterparts, and that women are more skilled in the art of disguise and performance" and that this is because "false female identities are often the result of a desperate need for concealment, a need that lays bare women's precarious social position."[36] Due to the constant surveillance, especially of women, they often feel the need to conceal their inner identity. The genre also opens up a way for women to embrace their nature rather than hide it. Most sensation heroines are far from the ideal set by Victorian standards, yet this is what makes them so intriguing in the first place.

The use of nervousness in *WW* is integral for its characters to be active participants in the narrative, rather than passive bystanders. The novel uses the sensations and nervousness of its characters to convey its plot: it relies heavily on its ability to create unease and tension in its reader, as it presents events and people in great detail. Each character that experiences the sensation of nervousness, with the exception of Mr. Fairlie and some minor characters, is able to perceive and interpret the events of the novel.[37] The gendered aspect of nervousness is important in this discussion, as D. A. Miller indicates, *WW* describes nervousness as highly feminine, through the manner in which Mr. Fairlie behaves, as well as Laura and Anne Catherick. All these characters seem to have been born nervous, according to Miller; however, I would argue that this mostly applies to Mr. Fairlie, as we never get any narrative from either Laura or Anne. Marian describes Laura and Mr. Fairlie as being, "in widely different ways, rather nervous and sensitive."[38] In addition, Laura does not suffer to the same extent as Mr. Fairlie's 'nerves,' at least, not until after her incarceration at the asylum. The same goes for Anne, as we are only introduced to her *after* she has escaped the asylum, not knowing the extent of the damage it has done to her being. Walter is especially effective in his appeal to the senses of the reader. A prime

[35] Allen, "Gender and Sensation," 405.
[36] Tara MacDonald, "Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 128.
[37] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 150.
[38] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 151; Collins, *The Woman in White*, 36.

example of this is his first meeting with the titular Woman in White, Anne Catherick, when "every drop of blood in [his] body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on [his] shoulder."[39] Walter has previously described himself to be walking alone, in the dark, thus this sudden appearance of the hand is as startling to the reader as it is to Walter. Walter also appeals to other sensations than nervousness and suspense in his narrative, such as love and sexual desire, through his description of both Laura and Marian, as well as most of the other characters he interacts with. Describing Laura, he appeals to those, mainly men, who have felt deep love for a woman: "Think of her as you thought of the first woman who quickened the pulses within you that the rest of her sex had no art to stir."[40] Walter thus applies his own sensations to the reader in order to make them connect with his own emotions.

According to both Miller and Balée, Marian exists "outside the sexual system of the novel" because she is unable to fit completely within either of the gender binaries – she cannot be fully male, nor fully female, falling somewhere in between, ultimately nullifying her gender identity.[41] This argument is not analyzed in depth, but only used as an explanation for Balée's concept of 'surplus women.' I would argue that Miller is somewhat right in his analysis of Marian's position in the Victorian sexual hierarchy, in that she does stand outside it. However, Miller's understanding seems to point to it being limiting for Marian rather than liberating. My understanding of Marian's existence in the novel is that of a liberated woman, untethered from the tools of oppression. Beauvoir explains that:

> what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness.[42]

Marian chooses to be neither male nor female, but rather a combination of the two. Butler stated that there was no correlation between sex and gender, thus Marian's biological sex has nothing to do with her gender identity.[43] Marian is frequently sexualized through male gazes, namely those of Walter and Count Fosco, for her voluptuous figure. Walter's descriptions of Laura, unlike

[39] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 20.
[40] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 50.
[41] Balée, "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women," 209; Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 179.
[42] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 17.
[43] Butler, "Gender Trouble," 328.

those of Marian, are more admiring and not as sexual. In many ways, he idolizes Laura for her almost childlike demeanor, comparing her gaze at him to "the pity of an angel" and "the innocent perplexity of a child."[44] In addition, Marian is not devoid of sexual desire. Having "[a]ctive and autonomous sexual feeling[s] […] denotes masculinity, or a deviant 'improper' femininity."[45] I would argue that Marian is the improper feminine, and that it is this exact role that provides her with the opportunity to fully liberate herself from her oppressive shackles. Thus, much like Lucy, Marian benefits from the same emotional privilege.

Marian's hyper-feminine body does not correspond to the masculine traits of her face. Although she often reinforces her female gender through her words, she also expresses masculine tendencies, in both demeanor and her appearance: "[m]y hands always were, and always will be, as awkward as a man's."[46] Here she genders herself masculinely, something that does not happen often throughout the narrative of *WW*; yet it bears the same amount of negativity she expresses in her comments on her own female attributes. While Marian is quite similar to Lucy in her social standing and unconforming behavior, her physical appearance sets her apart from any of the other heroines discussed in this thesis. Lucy is plain in her appearance, and Tess is perceived as quite beautiful, while Marian is described as ugly, with a "large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw" and "dark down on her upper lip [that] was almost a mustache."[47] Her physical appearance incorporates a masculine side that is not expressed in either Lucy or Tess. Because of these masculine attributes, she quickly stops being an object of visual pleasure, especially to Walter, and is thus freer in her self-expression. Unlike Laura, Marian is not bound by the same boundaries and conformities as her sister. Laura is limited by her conventional beauty and femininity, staying static and helpless throughout the entire novel. Laura, like most of *WW*'s characters, functions as a critique of Victorian hegemony. Laura's daydreams, her means of escaping the horror of her marriage to Sir Percival, take the shape of domestic submission to Walter:

> I used to see myself in my neat cheap gown, sitting at home and waiting for him, while he was earning our bread – sitting at home and working for him, and loving him all the better because I *had* to work for him – seeing him come in tired, and taking off his hat

[44] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 66.
[45] Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, 16.
[46] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 233.
[47] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 32.

> and coat for him – and, Marian, pleasing him with little dishes and dinner that I had learnt to make for his sake.[48]

Her own emphasis on the word *had*, further illuminates how much impact the male domineering gaze has had on her development as a woman and her understanding of her role in society. She thus represents the 'ideal' Victorian woman, being fair, chaste and demure; however, she is ultimately useless. Laura is constantly in need of assistance and barely has any power over her own destiny, being described by her sister as "pliability itself."[49]

Laura is so bound by gender expectations that she seals her own fate in marrying Sir Percival. In her one chance at freedom from her impending marriage, she removes the responsibility from herself and gives it to Sir Percival, which, in retrospect, was her greatest mistake; yet she seems to be somewhat aware of her predicament, praising God for Marian's poverty because it "made [Marian her] own mistress."[50] Her character is "too truthful to deceive others, [and] was too noble to deceive itself," thus she did what she believed to be the best for her, because that was what she was raised to do and she did not wish to shirk the responsibility instilled in her by her social standing.[51] The gaze that is upon her is judgmental, ready to quash any non-conforming attributes she might exhibit. Her love for Walter is punished harshly by Sir Percival, even though he solely married her for her money, with Laura noting: "[w]henever he is angry […] he refers to what [Laura] acknowledged to him in your presence, with a sneer or a threat," and that she has "no power to prevent him from putting his own horrible construction on the confidence [she] placed in him."[52] Here, Sir Percival is displaying his normative gaze. To him, she is now his belonging, and thus any love for another man is a grave transgression. Laura is the ultimate 'proper' feminine and devoted daughter. Unlike women in general, those who are deemed improper are not as oppressed as they might seem, due to their peripheral existence. In many ways, they are so far removed from the core of hegemony that they are not as limited as conforming women are.

[48] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 263.
[49] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 178.
[50] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 262.
[51] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 65.
[52] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 265.

2.3 Opposing Gazes

The narrative of *WW* is presented as it would be in court proceedings, representing it as a legal case to be argued. However, the reader is now the one being presented with all the evidence of the case to then make their own ruling: "[a]s the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now."[53] Like *Villette, WW*'s narrative is highly subjective due to its (multiple) first person narrators. In addition, there are parts of the narrative that are omitted due to lack of relevance to the main story, because nothing "shall be related on hearsay evidence."[54] Throughout the novel, we are privy to different narrators and thus different gazes. The most prominent narrators are Walter and Marian. These two characters have very pronounced gazes, and through them we get a very detailed description of the events of the novel. Walter states that he, "who write[s], am to guide," and that "the Story is to remain, from end to end, untangled in [his] hands."[55] Here, he addresses the *implied reader*, and cements his credibility by placing his own narrative and point of view first. The implied reader is "the audience presupposed by the narrative itself."[56] Because Walter is also a character in *WW*, his narrative is colored by his point of view. While we, as readers, are privy to Walter's *perceptual* point of view: what he physically sees, we also see his *conceptual* point of view: his ideology.[57] The issue with this is that the novel lacks a more objective narrator (although the narrator in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is not as objective as they might seem on the surface). Walter's awareness of the implied reader also problematizes his narrative because he can alter it in any way that he seems fit to make himself seem more competent. This is most obvious in the erasure of Marian's narrative in the Third Epoch of the novel, which he claims to be "often interrupted" and "often inevitably confused."[58] Although Laura's mental state has deteriorated after her stay in the asylum, Marian seems to still have her full faculties. The only conclusion to gain from this is that Walter is threatened by Marian's competence in rescuing her sister, which he was unable to do himself.

Unlike Lucy, and many of the other characters in *Villette*, Marian does not seem to take any pleasure in gazing at others for the sake of gazing, nor does she gaze out of the pleasure

[53] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 5.
[54] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 5.
[55] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 5, 420.
[56] Seymour Chatman, "Discourse: Nonnarrated Stories" in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 150.
[57] Chatman, "Discourse," 151.
[58] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 422.

derived from the objects of observation like Walter does. Marian's gaze is methodical and critical and arises purely out of necessity. Walter gazes as much as he pleases, relishing all the beauty he sets his eyes upon.

> This thought was enough to hold me at the window. I had sufficient consideration for her [Laura], to arrange the blind so that she might not see me if she looked up; but I had no strength to resist the temptation of letting my eyes, at least, follow her as far as they could on her walk.[59]

To Walter, there are no repercussions for his gazing. His gazes are more admiring and 'loving' than the gazes of other male characters, but there is still an uneven power dynamic in his and Marian's gazes. Not only is he not limited in where he is 'allowed' to rest his gaze, he is uninhibited by social standards and able to look whenever he pleases. Thus, his gazes, although plentiful, are not always as important to the narrative as a whole. Yet he is the character that narrates most of the novel.

The most successful spies come in the form of Marian Halcombe and Count Fosco and, by extension, his wife, Madame Fosco. Throughout *WW*, many of the characters, to varying degrees of success, participate in surveillance, and espionage. Letters are intercepted and read; overheard conversations are retold. Others are not as successful, such as Sir Percival's attempt to overhear any conversation between Laura and Marian at Blackwater Park: "I thought it more ominous still, that he [Sir Percival] should pretend, after dinner, to fall asleep in the drawing-room, and that his eyes should cunningly follow Laura and me, when he thought we neither of us suspected him."[60] Sir Percival, unlike Count Fosco, is inept at surveillance, although he seems to be unaware of that fact. His attempts at surveilling his wife and her sister fail because they are aware of his presence. Count Fosco and his wife are silent and looming, never truly making their subjects of observation aware of their surveillance. Madame Fosco's submissive nature also makes her quite unassuming, and thus gives her great advantages over her foes, such as easily gathering information from Marian and Laura's conversations through eavesdropping and the drugging of Laura's maid, Fanny, in order to retrieve a letter in Fanny's possession.[61] Even Marian's personal diary, which contributes to almost a third of the novel, is violated by Count

[59] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 91.
[60] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 291.
[61] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 349-350.

Fosco's eyes, as well as our own, and he even goes as far as to write in said diary. Miller describes this action as "virtual rape," as it violates the one of the most intimate aspects of Marian's life.[62] Her diary is our access to her thoughts and feelings, as well as to the events that transpire in the narrative.

In many ways, our own gazing is limited by the male characters in the novel. The story is compiled by men, mainly Walter, who only shows us the parts of the narrative *he* believes to be important to relate. In addition, the gaze we are presented with, in contrast to *Villette*, is predominately male, with the exception of Marian. Due to the subjective nature of the narrative, the (male) perspectives we are presented with are highly prejudiced by their personal beliefs and ideology. Thus, our understanding of such characters is highly influenced and tainted by the views of the narrators. This will be even more extreme in the next chapter, with the narrator of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* entangling the reader into his own scopophilic fantasies. Leah Henderson explains that "[t]he story consciously shows that the act of gazing can be easily misconstrued, and that true danger is in the words that people choose to speak, and how easily it could all be lies."[63] Throughout *WW*, Laura Fairlie is robbed of all her agency, although it might be argued that she never had any to begin with. Both her and Anne are without true voices, they are also without gazes, simply being reduced to objects.

As noted by Henderson, "Marian does not have the privilege to reciprocate [her] gaze upon Walter in her own diary entries."[64] After his arrival at Limmeridge House, Walter enters the breakfast room, finding Marian standing by the windows. Seeing her standing there, and as she had not noticed his entering, Walter "*allowed* [himself] the luxury of admiring her for a few moments."[65] Walter feels entitled to gaze on Marian's body and take pleasure from it. Marian's gaze is more calculated, as she is not at such liberty to gaze as Walter is. In fact, most of Marian's gazing is done in secret, through eavesdropping and looking from the shadows. Henderson notes that Marian's gaze in the novel "poses a significant question for feminist critics of the female gaze" because there has not been much study into the way women gaze at men.[66]

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[62] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 162.
[63] Leah Henderson, "Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde: Challenging Intersections Between the Male and Female Gaze in Victorian Popular Literature," *FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & the Arts*, no. 27 (Autumn 2018): 8.
[64] Henderson, "Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde," 4.
[65] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 31 (italics added).
[66] Henderson, "Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde," 6.

Due to her gender, Marian is unable to gaze purely out of pleasure. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the narrative is edited so not to include anything 'irrelevant.' Thus, it is highly feasible that any 'unaccepted' gazing from Marian could have been removed from the narrative. In fact, a lot of her narrative is not presented through her eyes, but through Walter's retelling of the events, removing Marian further from it.

Marian's gaze is possibly the most important one to explore in *WW* because of her unique gender perspective. Her gaze is the most prominent relating to her acts of espionage and her descriptions of other characters. Marian, being the improper feminine, has a different gaze. She is also the only female character that even has an active gaze presented in the narrative. After the kindling of romance between Walter and Laura (before her subsequent marriage to Sir Percival), Walter notices that Marian's "penetrating eyes had contracted a new habit of always watching [him]," and is told by Marian that she "h[as] heard and seen more than you think" hinting at her high awareness of the things happening around her. [67] Out of the protagonists of the novel, Marian is the most active participant in espionage. While Walter does attempt, and succeeds in, retrieving vital information responsible for the downfall of Sir Percival, Marian is the one who risks more by sneaking around and attempting to overhear information. As John Sutherland explains in his introduction to the 2008 Oxford World's Classics edition of *WW*, "[r]eaders of every period have been entranced by the epic duel between Fosco and Marian, with its turbulent sexual undertones."[68] She uses several pages in her journal to describe Count Fosco and how much she dislikes him, specifically focusing on his appearance. Henderson states that "when this gaze becomes so derogatory, revealing that women, like men, can be harsh critics of the opposite sex, conditioned by prejudices of class, power, and race."[69] Marian, much like Lucy, is quite judgmental in her gaze, and her main focus is on Count Fosco. The novel thus manages to break the boundaries of what are deemed 'acceptable' gazes in regard to gender.

In combination, the main characters create a microcosm of society as a whole, with each character representing an aspect of Victorian hegemony and its opponents. Sir Percival and Count Fosco represent aspects of the patriarchy: the overt violence towards women and the hidden danger, plotting in the shadows, respectively. Sir Percival may seem to be the villain of

[67] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 68, 124.
[68] John Sutherland, introduction to *The Woman in White*, by Wilkie Collins, ed. John Sutherland (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxi.
[69] Henderson, "Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde," 7.

the novel, when in fact Count Fosco, doing his evil deeds in the dark, is a far greater threat to our heroines. Madame Fosco represents the oppressed woman subdued by society through the threat of violence; Laura and Anne are the damsels in distress, the domestic angels. Finally, Marian is the threat to the status quo, representing non-conformity; and Walter represents those who benefit from hegemony. Together, they form their own panoptical prison, each surveilling the other. However, the motivations for this constant surveillance differ greatly from those of *Villette*. No one in *WW* uses surveillance as a tool of maintaining wanted behavior. Instead, it is used as a means of gaining (and maintaining) monetary value and status (Sir Percival and Count Fosco) or for the act of self-preservation (Marian and Walter). This form of hidden threat will be more apparent in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, as it lays the foundation for Tess's fate.

In addition to the intra-personal relationships of the characters in *WW* forming their own panoptical structure, the asylum in which both Laura and Anne are imprisoned also doubles as a panoptic prison, harshly stripping its prisoners of any sense of identity. Miller writes: "the novel represents discipline mainly in terms of certain general isolated effects on the disciplinary *subject*, whose sensationalized body both dramatizes and facilitates his functioning as *the subject/object of continual supervision*."[70] The asylum is used by Sir Percival as a tool to control the 'unruly' women that threaten his status. Anne is incarcerated first, as he believes her to know the secret of him being a bastard child, unable to rightfully hold his title. Laura is imprisoned later, in order for Sir Percival and Count Fosco to fake her death and claim her fortune. Through the constant surveillance in the asylum, women, such as Anne and Laura, are forced into the role of the madwoman in order for them not to be a threat to society, as they are stripped of their last ounce of autonomy and credibility. We only get to see Anne after the damage is done, so it is impossible to fully understand the change in her. However, Laura goes through a drastic alteration after her stay in the asylum. Not only is she wrongfully incarcerated, but she is placed there under the false identity of Anne. This furthers Laura's confusion in her own sense of identity. When rescued from the asylum, she is described as "[f]orlorn and disowned, sorely tried and sadly changed; her beauty faded, her mind clouded; robbed of her station in the world, of her place among living creatures."[71] The constant surveillance at the asylum has erased the aspects of Laura that were integral to her identity, making her a shell of her former self.

[70] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 158 (italics in original).
[71] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 422.

Normative behavior became the cornerstone for sanity, while anything veering outside these parameters, any immorality, was frequently confused with insanity.[72] The history of the Victorian asylum abounds with anxiety and outrage, especially concerning wrongful incarceration. Throughout the Victorian era, there was a great change in the treatment and understanding of mental illness, as well as the living conditions in the asylums themselves. During the first half of the nineteenth century, said mental asylums were dark and filthy places, where inmates were restrained and living in inhumane conditions; but by the middle of the century, "the Victorian asylum saw madness domesticated, released from restraint, and unnervingly like the world outside the walls."[73] Just as the conditions of the asylums progressed, so did the understanding of female insanity. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was believed that women were "less susceptible to mental illness than men;" however, as time went on, more and more women were committed to asylums.[74] The doctors responsible for committing patients to the asylums usually relied on their own understanding of sanity, based on their understanding of the inner functions of their own mind, and thus "declaring persons sane or insane according to the 'rightness' of their opinions and thoughts."[75] With this, the criteria for insanity were highly subjective and based on normative rule.

With this biased understanding of mental illness, the doctors, as well as the asylums as a whole, were thus the arbiters of hegemony. The structure of the asylum became a panopticon censuring all 'immorality.' With women, the reason for their incarceration was often linked to 'deviance' from the feminine role.[76] In *WW*, Sir Percival managed to commit Anne to the asylum by bribing her mother, Mrs. Catherick; once she was committed, all her agency was stripped away, and her subsequent escape made the incarceration of Laura in her stead all the easier. The fear of wrongful incarceration increased drastically during the Victorian era, yet asylums being necessary was still a strongly held belief, and that the wrongful incarceration of a sane person only took place "because the greed, stupidity, or malevolence of those responsible for his commitment had perverted the asylum system from its true purpose."[77] This, however, does

[72] Peter McCandless, "Liberty and Lunacy: The Victorians and Wrongful Confinement," *Journal of Social History* 11, no. 3. (Spring, 1978): 376.
[73] Elaine Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*, ed. Andrew Scull (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 314.
[74] Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 315.
[75] McCandless, "Liberty and Lunacy," 375.
[76] Showalter, "Victorian Women and Insanity," 324.
[77] McCandless, "Liberty and Lunacy," 367.

thoroughly align with the motives of Sir Percival, as he commits both women in order to retain his ill-gotten title and wealth.

The association with madness is almost a death sentence: in fact, it is for Anne, because these women are now left completely powerless in a world run by a ruthless patriarchy. Thus, another result of the wrongful incarceration of both Laura and Anne is the new social role that has been forced upon them: madwoman. This role is a "quasi-mandatory performance" which feeds into the already established tropes and stereotypes of women as unreliable "that contribute largely to their oppression."[78] Not only do Anne and Laura need to conform and perform in accordance with the Victorian domestic ideal, but they also now need to conform to the part of the madwoman. The institutionalization of Laura and Anne also functions as a way of discrediting them, if they were to attempt to accuse Sir Percival or Count Fosco of any wrongdoing. The moment they entered the asylum, both women lost the final sliver of their agency, as well as their credibility.

Just as Laura is stripped of the remnants of her identity in the asylum, Madame Fosco also loses her distinct 'unwomanly' character through her marriage to Count Fosco. Marian is highly aware of the power Count Fosco has over his wife, as well as the other characters around him: "He can manage me, as he manages his wife and Laura, as he managed the bloodhound in the stable-yard, as he manages Sir Percival himself, every hour in the day."[79] Laurie Garrison states that "Fosco seems at any time to be capable of enacting mesmeric control over Mme. Fosco at any time and regardless of whether he is present or not."[80] Garrison's analysis of the dynamics between the characters in *WW*, especially those including Count Fosco, is based on mesmeric trances. These mesmeric trances, or mesmerism, were believed to be "trances where senses intermingled and consciousness departed the physical body."[81] I do agree with Garrison in terms of her observation of Count Fosco's seemingly ever-present hold on his wife; however, I would argue that it is also due to the ingrained panoptic structure of their relationship. As a young woman, Madame Fosco, née Eleanor Fairlie, is described by Marian as "one of the most impertinent women […] capricious, exacting, and vain to the last degree of absurdity."[82]

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[78] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 168.
[79] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 225.
[80] Laurie Garrison, "Magnetic Science and the Sensation Novel: Stimulating Bodies, Senses and Souls," in *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 73.
[81] Garrison, "Magnetic Science and the Sensation Novel," 56.
[82] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 193.

Through her relationship with the Count, she has been changed drastically, with any of remnants of her old personality gone:

> As Eleanor Fairlie […] she was always talking pretentious nonsense, and always worrying the unfortunate men with every small exaction which a vain and foolish woman can impose on long-suffering male humanity. As Madame Fosco […] she sits for hours together without saying a word, frozen up in the strangest manner in herself. […] she sits speechless in corners […] On occasions when her cold blue eyes are off her work, they are generally turned on her husband, with the look of mute submissive inquiry which we are all familiar with in the eyes of a faithful dog.[83]

So strong is Count Fosco's hold on his wife that even after his death she still remains faithful to him. If her manipulation was only surface level, and the threat of violence her only fear, she would revert back to her old ways after Count Fosco was murdered. However, she writes a biography of her late husband which was "entirely devoted to the praise of his domestic virtues."[84] Madame Fosco has thus been so manipulated, through years of abuse and controlling gazes, that her old coquettish identity is gone and is replaced with a submissive one, thus exemplifying how far the oppression of women can go if it remains unchecked. Under her new name, she no longer has a first name; throughout the novel, she is simply Madame Fosco, an extension of her husband. He has made her submit to him unconditionally. Marian states that if she had married Count Fosco, she "should have made his cigarettes as his wife does" and "held [her] tongue when he looked at [her], as [Madame Fosco] holds hers."[85] The gazing done in the panoptic structure creates a "power of mind over mind" and that is exactly the hold Count Fosco has over his wife.[86] Her behavior suggests a combined fear and love for her husband, which has been obtained through psychological manipulation – or mesmerizing, as Garrison explains it. His behavior towards his wife mirrors that of the patriarchy: in public he is loving and flattering, giving her kisses on the hand and treats; but in secret, behind closed doors, she is ruled by a "rod of iron" which "never appears in company."[87]

Madame Fosco has been conditioned, through love and punishment, to conform, and is thus dependent on her husband. She is so afraid of incurring his wrath, should she not behave

[83] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 218-219.
[84] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 641.
[85] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 219.
[86] Foucault, "Panopticism," 501.
[87] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 224-225.

correctly, that she does anything to avoid it. She has internalized the panoptic structure in her own being, thus making the 'private rod of punishment' redundant. At this point in her conditioning, the rod is no longer needed, the potential threat of it is enough to keep Madame Fosco in line. Due to the strict conditioning done by her husband, she is now left without agency and function without his guidance. She is completely at Count Fosco's command, doing anything he wishes; she would never speak or act "without her husband's permission."[88] She states that she "has no secrets from [her] husband, even in trifles," showing that she will relay *any* information she gathers. She becomes an unassuming spy, being almost invisible in her quest for intel:

> Madame Fosco had evidently been watching outside. The mischief she might to by herself, was little to be feared. But the mischief she might do, as a willing instrument in her husband's hands, was too formidable to be overlooked.[89]

It is clear that Marian understands the threat that Madame Fosco poses to her and Laura due to het submission to her husband's will. Alone she represents no danger, but as a puppet in Count Fosco's schemes she can be a substantial threat.

A pivotal part of the narrative is Marian eavesdropping on Sir Percival's and Count Fosco's conversation. Throughout *WW*, Marian has been very active in her surveillance of Sir Percival and Count Fosco, yet this instance stands out from the others. Marian has become desperate to discern the intentions of her opponents and decides her only course of action is to attempt to overhear their conversation. She "had made up [her] mind that there should be a listener when those two men sat down to their talk – and that the listener, in spite of all the Count's precautions to the contrary, should be [herself].[90] This instance of surveillance transforms her gaze from visual to aural, as Marian is positioned thus on the verandah to only be able to hear the conversation between the two men, and not gaze at their actions. In this case, the eavesdropping becomes more important, because looking at them would not divulge the same form of information, if any at all. Ann Gaylin states that the "illicit overhearing" enacted in *WW* "reveals anxieties about the vexed relations between gender, identity, and narrative and social agency."[91] The act of eavesdropping transgresses domestic spheres and gives Marian the access

[88] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 299.
[89] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 313.
[90] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 324.
[91] Ann Gaylin, "The Madwoman Outside the Attic: Eavesdropping and Narrative Agency in The Woman in White," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 304.

to information she would otherwise be unable to obtain due to her gender. In an instance where the gaze would fail her, Marian adapts and manages to surveil her opponents. In a different layer of surveillance, the gaze of Sir Percival and Count Fosco also fails them, yet so does their hearing. I would argue that they only rely on their sight to retain their control, and thus are not able to adapt out of necessity. We also see this in Madame Fosco, who also uses aural surveillance, but only in female-designated spaces. Her eavesdropping does not transgress gender boundaries in the way Marian's does. The act of eavesdropping thus becomes gendered, becoming even more transgressive when entering male spaces.

The way that literary narrative functions is through the readers being onlookers to the narrative and the characters of the novel; and, as often discussed in criticism of this novel, the act of surveillance and gazing is often doubled and represented in the reader of the novel. As discussed by Gaylin, Marian's eavesdropping "provides a doubly layered, spatial representation of such liminality" because "the act of deliberately overhearing is […] a transgression of boundaries."[92] Due to "its illicit nature and the threat of discovery," Marian's eavesdropping creates a "fascination for the reader (the metanarrative eavesdropper)," as well as anxiety for the "possibility that the flow of information will be cut off and the eavesdropper caught and punished."[93] Both Miller and Gaylin discuss how the readers of *WW* are onlookers watching the characters in the novel, and are as intrusive, if not more so, as Count Fosco's vandalization of Marian's journal.[94] In *WW*, the position of the reader as onlooker of Marian's transgressions heightens the sensations of anxiety and thrill, enticing the reader further. Gaylin continues this thought, stating that to "eavesdrop on the conspirators, Marian literally and figuratively assumes a position of power similar to the invulnerable place of the reader."[95] What is different here is that Marian is very vulnerable in her current position of surveillance, yet she is also empowered. As she prepares for her mission, she sheds her feminine clothing and thus transcends her gender. To do what she needs to, she must let go of the societal restraints represented in her clothing.

[92] Gaylin, "The Madwoman Outside the Attic," 315.
[93] Gaylin, "The Madwoman Outside the Attic," 315.
[94] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 164.
[95] Gaylin, "The Madwoman Outside the Attic," 316.

2.4 Gender Reinscribed

"This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve."[96] These are the first words presented to the reader and are the crux of the ironic nature of gender expectations explored in *The Woman in White*. As stated by Christopher Parker, the "Victorians had a clear idea of what constituted appropriate qualities of femininity and masculinity," yet they were still "quite willing to ascribe 'feminine' characteristics to men and 'masculine' characteristics to women."[97] He suggests that there was unease and uncertainty in the binary of gender, and that the lines between femininity and masculinity were starting to become more blurred. This caused some issues for those trying to argue that gender was fixed, as common understanding of gender constructs had shifted.[98] This is most notable in Marian and Mr. Frederick Fairlie, where Collins has heightened the opposite gender connotations. However, this did not mean that all behavior was accepted, and it seemed to be more acceptable for women to exhibit masculine traits than for men to display feminine ones. This is most likely due to masculinity having positive connotations and femininity having negative ones. Men define women: they are seen as a true and positive foundation for everything. Women get their 'value' through their comparison to this male 'ideal.'[99] Female attributes and femininity are thus deemed as lesser, and any man possessing any of these aspects is then, by default, also a lesser man than those who are more masculine in the eyes of society. Mr. Fairlie is the victim of this, especially in the eyes of Walter, as he is presented as a highly disagreeable man, having his "sympathies shut themselves up resolutely at the first sight of Mr. Fairlie."[100]

Mr. Fairlie is described as having a "frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look" and "effeminately small" feet "clad in buff-coloured silk stockings, and little womanish bronze-leather slippers."[101] His appearance is so off-putting to Walter, with it being "something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its association with a man, and at the same time, something which could by no possibility have looked natural and appropriate if it had been

[96] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 5.
[97] Christopher Parker, "Introduction," in *Gender Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Christopher Parker (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 11.
[98] Parker, "Introduction," 11.
[99] Beauvoir, "*The Second Sex*," 5.
[100] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 40.
[101] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 39.

transferred to the personal appearance of a woman."[102] Walter's words here are quite telling of his unease with the fluctuation in gender roles. Mr. Fairlie's effeminacy is satirical and highly exaggerated for effect. He is one of *WW*'s lesser villains, yet he is one the most despicable characters in the novel. Like many of Collins's gallery of intricate and complex male villains, Mr. Fairlie pushes "the boundaries of appropriate masculinity," and is the sensation fiction equivalent of "the gothic villain who imprisons his victim in remote a European castle and takes advantage of her naïveté and vulnerability."[103] Mr. Fairlie proves to be selfish and entitled, refusing to aid his niece in escaping the peril presented by her husband Sir Percival.

The patriarchal family structure's greatest threat seems to be the 'improper' feminine, and yet it also seemed to be a key tool in its enforced submission of women. The only way to make them into 'proper' women who are completely submissive was to integrate them into this family structure. Many who believed in the Victorian domestic ideology placed the woman as its "cornerstone," yet seemed to, quite paradoxically, ignore her lack of any tangible rights.[104] Women were supposedly in control of their own domestic sphere; however, they did not, in fact, possess any power and were in complete dependence on the men in their lives. The ending of *WW* can be understood as a form of submission of the 'improper' feminine in Marian. Although not a conventional family structure, Marian still is integrated into it, functioning as a companion to both Laura and Walter. Balée describes Marian's role in this family as a 'surplus' woman; ultimately, a spinster. Many women were left without any prospects of marriage as a result of the Crimean War during the 1850s.[105] Although Marian seems to be a spinster of her own accord (she does indeed receive a lot of male attention throughout the novel), she is nonetheless an addition to Walter and Laura's marriage rather than having one of her own. In many ways, she seems more important to the marriage to Walter than Laura, as Laura's attributes as the domestic angel only has a surface value, whereas Marian represents a deeper emotional and intellectual connection for Walter. It might seem as though Marian is Laura's emotional crutch, as she never wants her to leave her:

[102] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 39-40.
[103] MacDonald, "Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity," 136.
[104] Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, 56.
[105] Balée, "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women," 204, 199.

> ‘promise you will never marry, and leave me. It is selfish to say so, but you are so much better off as a single woman – unless – unless you are very fond of you husband – but you won’t be very fond of anybody but me, will you?’[106]

However, she is more of a crutch for Walter, as he does not truly get much from his marriage with his angelic Laura:

> Others, who do not look at her with my eyes and recollections, would probably think her improved. […] But I miss something when I look at her – something that once belonged to the happy, innocent life of Laura Fairlie, and that I cannot find in Lady Glyde.[107]

After her marriage to Sir Percival and her wrongful incarceration, she is forever changed, becoming even more dependent on others, like a child, and thus is unable to be any true companion for Walter. As Balée states, Marian and Walter almost become the parents of an infantile Laura.[108] Laura, being painfully aware of her own uselessness and inability to change her situation, stands as a critique of the role of the domestic angel and how truly useless she is in matters that are of true import, such as money:

> ‘I am so useless – I am such a burden on both of you,’ she answered, with a weary, hopeless sigh. ‘You work and get money, Walter, and Marian helps you. Why is there nothing I can do? You will end in liking Marian better than you like me – you will, because I am so helpless! Oh, don’t, don’t, don’t treat me like a child!’[109]

Through his contrasting of the two sisters, Collins emphasizes the detrimental effect the gaze has on women and how it constricts their life. Because Laura was confined within her role of the angel, and later madwoman, she has no control over her own life and is unable to fully contribute to her relationships with others. Marian has broken free of the gendered expectations and thus gains more autonomy; yet she, alone, is unable to dismantle the entire system that still oppresses her sister. Walter seems to ‘need’ Marian as a companion in order to get the fullest gratification out of his marriage, showcasing that physical attributes alone are not enough to have any meaningful relationships. This ending shows Collins’s critical view on domesticity, and the lack of value of the ideal of the Victorian domestic angel.

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[106] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 215.
[107] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 213.
[108] Balée, “Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women,” 204.
[109] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 489.

While Marian's narrative is arguably the most important in the novel, it is edited and elided heavily by Walter throughout *WW*. This elision of Marian's narrative not only forces the male gaze upon a female narrative, but it limits Marian's gaze as well. "While Marian narrates the second volume, her diary entries only fill the middle part of the story, from which Walter is absent," comments Henderson. She states that Marian's heroics, such as the rescue of Laura, are downplayed by Walter's elision of these events, having it [the rescue] "merely summarised in the third volume, [thus] underplaying Marian's masculine and heroic role in saving Walter's love."[110] Not only are we as readers deprived of Marian's experiences, but she is also robbed of her ability to present and enact her own gaze. Walter states that the narrative is to be based on the persons that are more closely related to the incidents and that he "will retire from the position of narrator."[111] Yet, in this instance, Walter does not retire, but rather coopts Marian's own narrative into his own.Walter's inability to be of any true assistance to Laura, such as helping her escape the mental asylum, surveilling their opponents in order to get the upper hand and protecting her from the violent outbursts of Sir Percival (both Marian's doing), creates a great divergence from the strong male hero that is often found in sensation fiction, such as Robert Audley fighting for the justice of his friend George Talboys in *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Balée claims that Walter is a "eunuch who becomes more manly through his association with Laura and Marian."[112] I do agree somewhat with this statement; however, it makes Walter seem very secure in his masculinity, as well as implying that he contributes a lot to the resolution of the conflicts in the novel. He does become a more capable man during his time away in South America, yet for all intents and purposes, Marian has 'taken' Walter's role as savior and hero. Thus, through his overtaking of Marian's narrative, Walter has attempted to reduce the damage done to his own masculinity by reducing Marian's contributions. Laura's fragile state, and his own belief that he is Laura's *true* savior, are used to reinforce his own gender identity that has been challenged by Marian.

Many critics claim that Marian becomes more feminized throughout the novel, mostly due to Count Fosco and his reading of her private journal.[113] Thus to them, not only does Count

[110] Henderson, "Wilkie Collins and Oscar Wilde," 4.
[111] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 5.
[112] Balée, "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women," 203.
[113] Balée, "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women," 203; Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 183; Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, 236.

Fosco possess an oppressive gaze, but a feminizing one, as his gaze upon her journal is enough to reduce her to a more feminine disposition. This interpretation of Marian's character is interesting, but it does leave a lot undiscussed. What this interpretation assumes is that Marian suffers from this 'feminization' of her character and that it subtracts from the development of her character. I disagree with this, as it reduces Marian to a set of binaries rather than acknowledging the fluid composition of gender aspects that she truly possesses. As Miller claimed, Marian is outside the sexual spectrum, thus she is not confined within the binaries of gender. In some respect she is impervious to the gaze because it is unable to fully comprehend her nature. Due to her embodiment of both male and female attributes, she veers so far from the norm that she cannot be categorized – she "cannot be reduced to either term of a phallic binarism."[114] Also, the connotations that her being 'feminized' is something negative contradicts the purpose of the discussion most of these academics are trying to convey.

Many might perceive Marian's view of women to be internalized misogyny, or ironic representation of this misogyny. However, I would argue that it is both. Marian claims herself that she does not "think much of my own sex," and that is quite apparent as the narrative is brimming with examples of her point of view.[115] Marian's gender identity is composed of both masculine and feminine traits, thus she will behave accordingly. As understood by most of the characters in *WW*, Marian has "the foresight and resolution of a man."[116] Thus, her mental acuity and intelligence have male connotations. From this, it is not hard to argue that her views on women and their capacity will align with those stemming from men. In addition, she has been conditioned by society to believe that she is lesser because she is a woman. She has ultimately turned her own (male) judgmental gaze on herself. While being such a steadfast and headstrong woman, having the highest capabilities, she still makes self-deprecating comments about herself, both in conversations with others and in her private thoughts written in her journal. She constantly, and unnecessarily, genders her actions and emotions, making it seem as though she needs to remind the reader (and those around her) that she is, in fact, a woman:

> Being, however, nothing *but a woman*, condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats, for life, I must respect the housekeeper's opinions, and try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way. […] I will give you some tea to compose your spirits, and *do*

[114] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 179.
[115] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 33.
[116] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 330.

> *all a woman can* (which is very little, by-the-by) to hold my tongue. […] My courage was a *woman's courage*, after all; and it was very near to failing me.[117]

All her comments undercut her own emotions and actions, making her seem as though she believes herself weaker than she truly is because of her gender. Yet she also seems to be offended if these perceptions of her character are uttered by anyone other than herself: "you pay my feelings a great compliment in thinking them weak enough to be shocked by such an urchin as that!"[118] The sarcasm in this comment is almost tangible, and blurs the lines as to whether or not Marian truly does not believe in the interpretations of her female character she presents to both readers and the other characters within the novel, thus deepening the complexity of her character. Her understanding of female inferiority does not seem to apply to her on more than a surface level, yet in others they bear a much greater importance. Her internal view of herself is colored by her male attributes, combining both male and female hatred of women. This is where the irony presents itself. Although Marian actually seems to believe that women are inferior, her comments are meant to come across as satire. Her stance on women, and their abilities based on their gender, is not to be taken at face value. If this came from a male character, it would be seen as 'truth;' but because Marian *is* a woman, it gives her statements more depth and becomes a parody of Victorian hegemony. Thus, through her actions, and *not* her words, she proves herself to be the most capable character in the entire novel, thus not only exemplifying the new and improved sensation heroine, but also the freer and more liberated woman.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

To conclude the ideas examined in this chapter, *WW* presents a new insight and interpretation of Victorian femininity and womanhood. Through his use of narration and character presentation, Wilkie Collins transgresses gender expectations; and, through Marian Halcombe and Walter Hartright, reverses their roles as hero and useless damsel. The challenging of gender norms in *WW* functions as a critique of normativity, especially of the angel in the house, as it is ultimately a useless role due to the confines it presents. Women in the Victorian era were confined by male expectations of femininity, yet those who never had prospects of living up to this ideal were

[117] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 200, 33, 326 (italics added).
[118] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 86.

much freer than their demure counterparts. Characters such as Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick are unable to transcend their position in society because they are too tethered to the expectations society has put upon them. Instead of celebrating the angel, Collins celebrates its opponent, the improper feminine, in hopes of broadening the understanding and representation of Victorian femininity. The novel also exemplifies the way that Marian embodies the change in the female ideal, as she has both masculine and feminine attributes, placing her outside the bounds of hegemony and the oppressive male gaze.

The exploration of the gaze in *WW* exemplifies how the gaze takes on many shapes, and that it differs from person to person as well as depending on context. Marian's gaze enlightens the readers to how the gaze as a concept also applies to women, and how that in turn affects them. In *WW*, the male gaze has become more prevalent and sexualized, rather than the judgmental and 'protective' gaze in *Villette*. At the beginning of the novel, Marian is sexualized by Walter, but this ends quite rapidly once he sees her face. Marian's physical attributes, as well as her wealth and social status, relives her of the pressure to conform, because to many it is 'wasted' on her. What we see in *WW* is the slow shift in ideals and social constructs, which come to a head in the next chapter, concerning *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Through her relinquishing of her traditional femininity, and her embrace of her position outside the sexual binary, Marian transcends into a powerful heroine.

3 Woman as Image: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and Scopophilic Fantasies

> Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order.[1]

Tess of the d'Urbervilles presents a very real image of the threat women face in the form of the male gaze. The above extract exemplifies the issue at the core of this novel: how often and how easily the gaze is placed on women. Indeed, how "so *often* the coarse *appropriates* the finer thus."[2] In *Tess*, the gaze takes on the most overt and destructive form of all the novels discussed in this thesis. Unlike *Villette*, where surveillance is the main form of gaze, *Tess* presents a more literal form – the entire plot of the novel is put into motion because Alec d'Urberville is unable to limit his gaze. Of the three novels examined in this thesis, *Tess* was published the latest; at the end of the nineteenth century, when attitudes regarding sex and sexuality were starting to shift towards becoming more progressive. This allows for a different angle in the discussion of femininity and the male gaze because attitudes were changing, sexuality had become more accepted as a topic of discussion, and the parameters of the concept were becoming more inclusive and diverse. As we have seen in the novels discussed in this thesis, there has been a progression of female expression of femininity and in the visibility of the male gaze.

Through the narrative in *Tess*, we as the reader become privy to the destructive results of a single gaze: that of Alec d'Urberville. It is this element that will be the main focus of this chapter. *Tess* was written to challenge the attitudes society had towards sex, especially in relation to women. As many academics have discussed, the critique of Hardy's writing of female characters differs vastly from claiming him to make "severely critical and over-generalized statements about women," to claiming he "treats women with the same devotion to physical detail as he gives to the male."[3] Many claim his writing to be highly sexist and degrading to

[1] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, eds. Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 83.
[2] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 83 (italics added).
[3] Mary Childers, "Thomas Hardy, The Man Who 'Liked' Women," *Criticism* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 319; Rosmarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 1988), xi.

women, yet others believe he was innovative and broke with convention. The gaze in *Tess* represents the violent threat of the patriarchal panoptic structure, especially during the Victorian era. I would argue that although Alec's gaze is violent in nature, it is Angel Clare's normative and judgmental gaze that leads Tess Durbeyfield to her doom. In *Tess,* the gaze is used as a tool of oppression, leading to violence. Here, the gaze places images of desire upon Tess in order for her to conform with each of the gazers' own comprehensions of femininity and womanhood. Where this novel differs from the others discussed, other than the more overt sexual imagery, is how Tess's non-conformity places her down a path of violence and death. Because Tess fails to live up to the ideals put upon her by society, Alec, and Angel, she is punished through the narrative of the novel. The narrator is complicit in this scopophilic regime, taking on the role of the voyeur, receiving immense gratification from his surveillance and gazing at Tess. Unlike both *Villette* and *The Woman in White*, the narrator in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is not a part of the narrative himself; he is not a character in the novel, but he stands safely outside the core narrative, fetishizing Tess without any real repercussions.

Following the structure of the two previous chapters, I will, in this chapter, combine Foucault's panoptic theory with the theories of Mulvey: specifically, her theories on the gaze and visual pleasure in cinema. Mulvey's theory of the male gaze is relevant to this discussion, but it does also have its limitations, which will be addressed. Unlike the two other novels examined in this thesis, the panoptic structure, especially in the form of surveillance, is not as visible and tangible in *Tess*; rather, it becomes transformed into something more elusive. *Tess* presents a more straightforward representation of the male gaze and its implications and consequences. In this novel, the gaze has become overt, no longer lingering in systems, but more physically in the eyes of the male characters. The male gaze in *Tess* is representative of the enforcement of Victorian gender norms, in the form of Angel, and the society that condemns Tess, but it has shifted to a more objectifying gaze that we barely saw a glimpse of in *Villette*, and that was slowly rearing its head in *The Woman in White.* I will argue that the gaze in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the most sexualized, and that Tess is the most sexually objectified heroine of the novels discussed in this thesis. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the male gaze is integral to Tess's journey, both in her representation and understanding of self, and as a tool for her ultimate 'downfall' and execution. This thesis will argue that there is a plethora of damaging sexualized gazes, and this sexual nature permeates all the layered gazes within the novel. I will also argue

that the narrator of the novel is the most objectifying gaze in the novel, as the narrator uses Tess to fulfill his own scopophilic fantasies; and, in doing so, also drags the readers of the novel into perpetuating this objectification of our titular heroine.

Firstly, I will discuss the notion of the gaze, as presented by Mulvey, and Sigmund Freud's theory of scopophilia and how that translates to the literary medium. I will continue with the discussion of Victorian femininity and concept of the fallen woman. Unlike *Villette* and *The Woman in White*, *Tess* explores the social consequences for women who had sexual relations outside of marriage, regardless of consent. *Tess* was published at the fin-de-siècle and thus the understanding of gender roles had shifted since the 1860s, when *The Woman in White* was published. Following this I will discuss how the gaze presents itself in the novel, mainly through Angel, Alec, and the narrator of the novel. Finally, I will discuss how woman as image creates spectacle for both the readers of *Tess*, and the characters within the novel.

3.1 Visual Pleasure: The Gaze in Literature

> Clare continued to observe her. She soon finished her eating, and having a consciousness that Clare was regarding her began to trace imaginary patterns on the tablecloth with her forefinger, with the constraint of domestic animal that perceives itself to be watched.[4]

The notion of the gaze has been discussed at great length in this thesis, yet not all avenues have been explored. *Tess* presents the most literal (and aggressive) form of the gaze: although surveillance is not something that appears in the novel, the entire plot rests on the gazes of two of the male main characters. This novel has a greater focus on the female form, and the sexual gratification gained from it, than *Villette* and *The Woman in White*. Mulvey explored the notion of the gaze and visual pleasure within cinema, and this theory is highly relevant for the analysis of the gaze in *Tess*. Although her theorizing is solely focused on cinema, it is still applicable to the analysis of literature. The gaze takes on many different forms, even within literature. Other academics, such as Anna Despotopoulou and Rona May-Ron, have used Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure and applied it to literature, discussing its presence and effect in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, respectively. Judith Mitchell also implements Mulvey's theories in her analysis of the female readers of Hardy, as does Jeff

[4] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 136.

Nunokawa in his discussion of Tess as spectacle, both of which will be discussed later in this chapter. In *Tess*, there are many different gazers: and they are layered, some interacting, and others further away from the core of the narrative.[5] This aspect is both interesting and important because it shows the permeation of the male gaze in narrative layers of literature, especially in *Tess*. By analyzing how each layer enacts its gaze, we learn more about both the societal context of a work's creation and the personal ideology of its creator.

Mulvey's theories are based on psychoanalysis: specifically, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's contributions to the field. She uses psychoanalytic theory as a tool; it is her "political weapon" used to dismantle the misogynistic pleasure derived from cinema.[6] Much of Mulvey's foundation for the exploration of male gazes is based on Freud's theory of *scopophilia* and his *castration complex*. According to Freud, "[v]isual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused."[7] Scopophilia is the pleasure derived from looking and is a tool for objectification for the satisfaction of one's own sexual desires. In *Tess*, on the surface, this aligns mostly with Alec's character; however, it goes much deeper than this. Alec is not the only character placing his desires on Tess: Angel also participates in this, as well as the narrator. The latter often uses suggestive language and lingers on Tess's body, complimenting her figure, such as "her bouncing handsome womanliness."[8] In fact, the narrator of the novel places themselves into the narrative so often, they can, arguably, be construed as one of the characters of the novel.

On its own, scopophilia was deemed perfectly normal by Freud; but it was easily converted to perversion by focusing on taboo elements, such as voyeurism and exhibitionism.[9] The castration complex is based on the fact that, according to Freud, both men and women believe that they are born with a penis, but the woman has lost it due to castration. This complex starts in childhood and creates a conflict between young girls and boys. The boys believe that the clitoris is no true substitute for the penis and thus deem women lesser, and the girls develop envy

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[5] Judith Mitchell, "Hardy's Female Reader," in *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 172-187. Jeff Nunokawa, "Tess, Tourism, and the Spectacle of the Woman," in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. Linda M. Shires (New York: Routledge, 2012. Vital Source Bookshelf).
[6] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 232-233.
[7] Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachery, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 7, comp. and ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 69.
[8] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 21.
[9] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 234; Freud, *On Sexuality*, 70.

for the penis that they believe they lack.[10] Kaja Silverman describes it as a "culturally fostered mechanism for disavowing the male subject's symbolic castration – a device for covering over the self-alienation induced in him by the entry into language."[11] To her, as to many feminist critics, the castration complex functions as a tool for men to oppress women in order to 'escape' the threat that she poses to his masculinity. She explains that the 'intact' woman "makes good male lack through the fantasmatic restoration of phenomenal plenitude," while the male-created image of woman "provides a very different solution, reconciling the male subject to symbolic castration by situating him in a position of apparent discursive potency."[12] The image of women, especially within cinema, is highly affected by this phallocentric point of view, according to Mulvey. She claims that the common belief is that the woman's "lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence" and that it is the woman's "desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies."[13] Her image is that of something lacking, and she is forced to make up for that lack. In other words, she is described and presented through comparison with man as the absolute, without having value on her own. The woman's apparent castration also signifies the fear men have of their own castration, and the oppression of women is their only way to appease this anxiety.[14]

Silverman discusses how the castration complex affects Tess in the narrative. Tess, just like all women subjected to the male gaze, according to psychoanalysis, is objectified because she symbolizes lack. Like other critics of *Tess*, Silverman believes that Tess allows herself to be subjected to the gaze placed upon her without much resistance.

> To the degree that Tess conforms to male desire and vision, the male subject is able to locate himself on the side of the enunciation rather than the enounced – to align himself with the agency rather than the object of articulation. In so doing he seems to master his own lack, to move from a passive to an active relation to representation.[15]

To Silverman, Tess is complicit in her own objectification and sexualization. However, Silverman continues her discussion, claiming that "the supremacy of the male gaze must be

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[10] Freud, *On Sexuality*, 113-114.
[11] Kaja Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles,'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 18, no. 1 (Fall, 1984): 27.
[12] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 27.
[13] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 232.
[14] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 238.
[15] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 27.

constantly reasserted in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and always in the face of powerful opposition" because of the "the subject's insertion into a pre-existing discursive network which confers upon him or her a strictly relational identity, and so challenges any assumption either of self-presence or self-determination."[16] This implies that Tess does not, in fact, *completely* acquiesce to the objectification of her. This is evident in her hitting Alec in the face with her glove after his attempt at getting her to leave Angel and be his 'natural' wife, and her desperate attempt at disfigurement in order to escape the gaze.[17] Her opposition to the male gaze is subtle and often comes across as complete passiveness, yet there is noticeable defiance in her. Silverman's understanding of 'powerful opposition" seems to lie with symbolic castration and the concept of *aphanisis*.[18] The word in itself means 'disappearance,' and to Lacan it means "the loss of subjectivity."[19] I would argue that the meaning of this 'powerful opposition' is Tess's reluctance to fully conform. However complacent and passive she is perceived to be in the novel, she still manages to create uncertainties in her male counterparts.

The One is always defined by the Other, but because Tess, at times, seems like a non-entity, the identity of the One, i.e., the male gaze, has nothing to distinguish itself from, and thus becomes nothing and loses its identity. Tess is "often oscillating between two or more representations."[20] The conflicting descriptions of Tess create varying images of her, blurring the lines between the narrator, Tess, Angel, Alec, and even Hardy himself. Both Angel and Alec use different means in escaping the anxieties of castration that Tess represents, and yet they do not seem to work completely. Alec uses his powers of seduction to coerce/rape Tess, yet she still would not marry him, even if he offered, wondering "[h]ow a convulsive snatching at social salvation might have impelled her to answer him she could not say."[21] What Silverman seems to argue is that although Tess is a passive victim of the male gaze, it does not seem like said gaze is completely successful in pinning her down. Thus, the holders of the male gaze must wrestle for the power over her image.

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[16] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 27.
[17] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 351, 299.
[18] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 27.
[19] *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, s.v. "aphanisis," by Ian Buchanan, accessed April 13, 2022, https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.uio.no/view/10.1093/acref/9780198794790.001.0001/acref-9780198794790-e-40.
[20] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 12.
[21] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 93.

While Freud's castration complex does bear importance for the structure of Mulvey's discussion into visual pleasure and the understanding of the psychological foundation for this behavior, the focus for this thesis will mostly be on scopophilia. As a concept, scopophilia is a crucial part of the gaze as a whole and is highly relevant in the discussion of the gaze in *Tess*. Sex and sexuality are much more overtly discussed in the novel than in both *Villette* and *The Woman in White*, with it being a central theme rather than a vague aspect of the novel to be interpreted. Throughout the novel we are constantly presented with a sexualized gaze and the continuous objectification of Tess. Although scopophilia, on its own, is pervasive in *Tess*, Freud's castration complex does allow for more in-depth understanding of the pleasure derived from looking. To men, women represent the anxiety of castration, and thus they use scopophilia as a means of escape. Mulvey states that there are "two avenues of escape:" demystifying the woman, "counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object," or "complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish."[22] I believe that Angel and Alec (as well as the narrator) exhibit both these two forms of 'escape.' Thus, the castration complex lays the foundation for the scopophilic aspects of the novel.

According to Mulvey, only men have the ability to enact their desires, and they are only enacted on women:

> Women then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by the symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.[23]

To her, women are unable to project their own desires onto others and are thus fixed as objects for male sexual gratification and fetishization. Thus, men are able to project their scopophilic gaze upon women, but women are unable to reciprocate. The issue with this argument is that it diminishes women's agency to almost zero, claiming that only men sexualize others. In many ways, Mulvey's arguments on female sexualization aligns with the Victorian understanding of the angel in the house: an object ready to be subjected to sexualization, without sexual desires of her own. However, as we have seen throughout this thesis, in the likes of Lucy Snowe and

[22] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 238.
[23] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 232.

Marian Halcombe, women are very much capable of gazing, and have myriad reasons for doing so. Very often, this aspect of female characters within Victorian literature has been overlooked. In the case of *Tess*, the gazing of the titular character is subdued, but not completely absent. This is due to Tess never truly having a voice, as she does not narrate her story, as Lucy and Marian do; she is ultimately sidelined by the narrator, becoming the focalizer of the novel, as well as an object of sexualization. The third-person narrator further distances Tess from her own narrative, taking from her some of the capability, and the option, to hide herself from the reader, as Lucy does, making her more vulnerable to the objectification by both the narrator and the reader.

The presentation of Tess's own gaze in the novel is somewhat problematic, in that she is not the narrator of her own story; and when she does gaze, it is either to escape from her life, or it is to turn it on herself in a derogatory manner. This gaze is not presented through her own eyes, nor her own voice, but through the voice of the narrator, taking control over how she is presented. In this manner she is very similar to Laura Fairlie, who is without a true voice in the narrative of her own life. Tess is deprived of a voice of her own: she is only presented through the eyes of the narrator and the men who behold her. She "marks the limits of conventional understanding and points to her own unspoken experiences that lie beyond the boundary of the text."[24] We, as readers, are never privy to Tess's real thoughts, only the "illusory schemata by which Tess and those around her read her life."[25] Not only does this not create a true picture of Tess, but it imposes upon her roles that she does not want, but places her as "the object of desire and feeling, rather than a complex feeling and desiring subject."[26]

Lisa Hoffman-Reyes reads Tess's view of herself as normative and represents the "harm that results from traditional Victorian principles."[27] Much like Marian, in Tess we see an internalized misogyny, and again it functions as a tool to expose the biases of the normative Victorian gaze. Unlike Marian, however, who looks down on all women, Tess only seems to be oblivious to her own value. She always sees herself as inferior, due to her gender and class: "My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chances! When I see what you know, what you

[24] Margaret R. Higonnet, "A Woman's Story: Tess and the Problem of Voice," in *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, edited by Margaret R. Higonnet (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 15.
[25] Higonnet, "A Woman's Story," 16.
[26] Lyn Pykett, "Ruinous Bodies: Women and Sexuality in Hardy's Late Fiction," *Critical Survey* 5, no. 2 (1993): 161.
[27] Lisa Hoffman-Reyes, "'Terribly Beautiful:' Tess of the d'Urbervilles," *The Hardy Review* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 43.

have read, and seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am!"[28] Tess is conflicted by her being praised by Alec because she feels shame in having to go to potential family in order to ask for help: "Tess seemed for the moment really pleased to hear that she had won such high opinion from a stranger, when in her own esteem she had sunk so low."[29] As the novel progresses, her view of herself becomes worse as she is subjected to the scrutiny of those around her. Tess's vision "has been marred by society," especially because of Angel, who, through his harsh judgements and lack of forgiveness, makes her connect "her physical beauty to her 'sin.'"[30] Ultimately, Tess becomes the amalgamation of all the oppressive features in said characters; she is without a true voice in her own narrative (Laura), she is enforcing a normative gaze upon herself (Marian), and she is forced into different roles and identities based on her beholder (Ginevra Fanshawe). Thus, Tess epitomizes the devastating effect the panoptical structure and the male gaze can have upon a woman.

3.2 Fallen Angels and the New Woman

As discussed, *Tess* presents a different view on femininity than its companions in this thesis. In the two previous novels, the female characters do suffer hardships, such as Laura's and Anne Catherick's wrongful incarceration and the latter's death. Anne's death was tragic, yet it was not at the hands of society for her apparent 'sins,' as is the case with Tess. Tess was hanged for her murder of Alec, the catalyst for her tragic life. In many respects, *Tess* presents a more physical representation of gender and sexuality and has a much higher focus on the gendered body of Tess. The Victorian understanding of the body differs quite extensively from the contemporary one, with the belief that there were immense differences between the genders, as well as the social classes. There was a high emphasis on virtue and chastity when concerning women. Returning to Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House," this was the ideal for women; yet, as discussed, the notion of gender was not as strict and rigid as perceived on the surface. The act of sex was, to the Victorians, "often perceived as a crisis in the integrity of the body;" and, since marriage and sex were linked in the Victorian reality, women, as well as men, "were thought to

[28] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 141.
[29] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 52.
[30] Hoffman-Reyes, "'Terribly Beautiful,'" 44.

become different people after the imagined sexual apotheosis accompanying marriage."[31] The consequence of sexual relations was, to the Victorians, a physical change to the body. In the common morality within society lay a double standard: men could have sexual relations with women without the loss of their virtue, yet women would lose it instantly if they behaved similarly. Regarding women, "'virtue and 'physical chastity' were interchangeable terms."[32] This is highly exemplified in the relationship between Alec and Tess. In the novel, he is described as having a "reputation as a reckless gallant and heartbreaker." He has several flings, but faces no repercussions from society, unlike Tess, who is immediately chastised for her 'dalliance' with Alec.[33] Even though their sexual relations were not consensual, that did not seem to matter in the eyes of morality, and especially in the eyes of Angel and her hometown of Marlott. Once she had sex outside of marriage, Tess was marked as a fallen woman forever, being silently ousted by her community through judgmental gazes. The narrator seems to be aware of this, as he comments that an "immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm."[34] Not only is she to be changed emotionally, but she also cannot go back to her life as it was before her tryst.

Up until this point in this thesis, most of the female characters discussed have been middle-class women. The inclusion of Tess broadens the analysis of how the gaze effects women. The focus in academia has often been placed too much on middle-class women and the ideals they must live up to. In general terms, during the Victorian era, "middle-class women were imagined […] to be delicate and refined, working-class women were traditionally seen as coarse."[35] Helena Michie describes this difference in understanding as:

> a culture of separate corporeal realities where the bodies of men and women, the poor, the aristocracy, and the middle class were not only treated differently but were thought to have radically different needs and desires coming out of different bodily configurations.[36]

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[31] Helena Michie, "Under Victorian Skins: The Bodies Beneath," in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture,* ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 420.
[32] Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), x.
[33] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 95.
[34] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 83.
[35] Michie, "Under Victorian Skins," 410.
[36] Michie, "Under Victorian Skins," 409.

Because of this, the Victorian approach to female sexuality, and femininity, differed. This also applied to literature, as the heroines were mostly middle-class, and thus only their internal life was represented. The study of the working woman was not as prevalent, yet not completely missing. The novels of Elizabeth Gaskell are proof of this. What differs with *Tess*, however, is the formation and representation of the titular character. Tess is quite poor and works hard in the fields and as a dairy maid, yet she is described similarly, and has the same disposition as, a demure heroine from the middle class. Tess's physical descriptions and manner are, in fact, the complete opposite of coarseness; a tool used by Hardy to both break with conventions and make Tess more agreeable to readers. Her delicate and reserved way of being makes the condemnation of her more difficult, and, at least for some, aids with breaking stereotypes, adding further complexity to Tess's character. According to Michie, working-class women were not 'protected' by the domestic sphere like middle-class women and were thus "up for sale or exchange when they left the home."[37] By this logic, she claims that women working "makes the female body accessible both to the touch and to the eye."[38] This belief is most apparent in Alec's advances towards Tess. In our introduction to Alec, the narrator states that "there was a singular force in […] his bold rolling eye," foreshadowing his violent gazing.[39] From the moment he meets Tess, he notes her appearance, calling her "*my* beauty," and "*my* pretty girl," laying claim to her body through his objectification.[40] The second he puts his eyes on her, he is infatuated and determined to make her his own: she becomes his object of sexual gratification.

As the decades passed in the Victorian era, there was a distinct shift in social perceptions of gender and sexuality. Towards the end of the nineteenth century came a "period of serious inquiry of impassioned debate over central questions of moral and social behaviour."[41] The interest in the angelic middle-class woman only having marriage in mind became less interesting, and in her place came the New Woman. The discursive trope drew inspiration from real-life women who chose to defy normative ideas of marriage and gender expectations: she was the "embodiment of a complex of social tendencies."[42] In contrast to the New Woman, who questioned domesticity, was the fallen woman. According to Nina Auerbach, the fallen woman

[37] Michie, "Under Victorian Skins," 410.
[38] Michie, "Under Victorian Skins," 411.
[39] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 45.
[40] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 45, 46 (italics added).
[41] Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), 1.
[42] Cunningham, *The New Woman*, 3; Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, 139.

"came to embody everything in womanhood that was dangerously, tragically, and triumphantly beyond social boundaries."[43] While the New Woman broke with domestic ideals and normative femininity, she was still a member of society, while the fallen woman had entered a realm outside all societal relations. Both types of women were placed by society in "an exile from woman's conventional family-bounded existence."[44] Sexual relations in novels, during the Victorian era, were mostly "treated as hideous aberrations," with the fallen woman seen as "a stain on society," ultimately in need of punishment by either "intolerable pangs of conscience or by death – preferably both."[45] In the case of Tess, she does indeed suffer both. All this female development laid the foundation for *Tess* and its exploration of sexuality, femininity, and the male gaze.

The notion of gender and femininity was based on the Victorian understanding of biology, with the fixation being on finding and establishing the differences between the two sexes. The "medicalisation of sexuality" led to the combination of "the moral authority of the church with the apparent irrefutability of the scientist."[46] What this resulted in, was the establishment of the Victorian body, especially the female, in the schema of morality and misguided science. As the fin-de-siècle approached, more criticism was guided towards this earlier construction of femininity, and as "the veil of convention and hypocrisy" progressed, a new concept emerged: the "'real woman beneath."[47] While a lot of feminist efforts were utilized to break free of the Victorian conventions of biological difference, these new attempts managed to again rely on the terminology that once imprisoned them.[48] Unlike the ideal of the angel, the new term 'womanhood' appealed to the 'true nature' of women and their inherently female abilities. As Penny Boumelha critiques, this representation and understanding of women "reinforces the enclosure of women's experiences by their physiological organization," and "does not allow for deviation."[49]

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[43] Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 150.
[44] Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, 150.
[45] Cunningham, *The New Woman*, 21.
[46] Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982),13
[47] Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 85.
[48] Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 85.
[49] Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 86.

This approach to representing women is echoed in Pamela Jekel's analysis of Hardy's depiction of Tess. Although full of faults, his descriptions are "also deliberate;" and in Tess, Hardy only "sees humanity revealed."[50] Jekel seems to applaud Hardy for creating a more 'human' heroine, and with this I agree. Tess is complicated and a three-dimensional character, full of both merits and faults. She is faced with tremendous hardships in the form of class issues, gender inequality, and male violence and dominance, yet manages to retain her own set of moral values, to detrimental effect. Tess is a more raw and unfiltered character than Lucy or Marian. However, this representation of Tess is overshadowed by the overt gazing, especially that of the narrator, placing too much focus on her body and removing her voice from the narrative. In addition, by focusing on her 'feminine nature,' Hardy manages to place Tess in a new role constructed by men.

What Hardy does with his construction of Tess is to break with both genre and social conventions: she is not a 'pure' angel like Paulina or Laura, yet she is not a coquette like Ginevra. Pykett interprets this characterization of Tess as Hardy's attempt "to negotiate the polarities of a contradictory discourse on sexuality which constructs 'woman' either as a passive, asexual, bodiless saint, or as a physical, sexually active sinner," and "does so by creating a sexy, saintly 'sinner' who is more sinned against than sinning.[51] Hardy's attempt at portraying Tess, according to Pykett, fails, as he makes her a greater target for objectification because of her passivity:

> Hardy becomes caught up in the very contradictions which he is attempting to negotiate, and he creates a female character who dominates the novel, but who is rendered passive by being viewed more or less consistently through an insistently male gaze which fixes on the spectacle of the female body.[52]

Tess's characterization is placed solely through the lens of the male gaze, constantly fixing her as an object of sexual gratification and fetishization. Hardy's attempts at creating a different incarnation of Victorian femininity are unsuccessful, and rather create a static object unable to escape the male gaze. Although unintentional, one would presume, *Tess*'s narrator only

[50] Pamela L. Jekel, "*Tess Durbeyfield*," in *Thomas Hardy's Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities* (New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1986), 167.
[51] Pykett, "Ruinous Bodies," 158.
[52] Pykett, "Ruinous Bodies," 158.

reinforces the objectification of women, and makes the reader also complicit in its violation of Tess.

3.3 Insatiable Gazes

> Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects.[53]

This quotation amalgamates the sense of having the gaze projected upon oneself that Tess feels throughout the novel. Silverman suggests that *Tess*'s narrator believes that "Tess comes to an unhappy end not so much because she is subjected to a colonizing male gaze, but because she is constructed according to the image of Alec's rather than Angel's desire," and that the detrimental events in the novel would be avoided if Angel's gaze at Tess had "found its mark" at the May-Day dance. Silverman herself does not agree with this interpretation because it is far too vague and binary.[54] In this I would agree with Silverman, but not completely. Pykett's interpretation of the novel is more accurate, I would argue, because she places blame on both Alec and Angel. According to Pykett, *Tess* "explores the price the woman pays for masculine desire, both sexual and spiritual:" she "has to pay the price of Angel's spiritualisation of femininity, just as she pays for Alec's physicality."[55] The narrator seems to put sole blame on Alec for Tess's fate, when, in fact, the responsibility does not solely lie with him. Alec was the catalyst for the events in the novel, but it is Angel's highly judgmental and normative gaze that seals Tess's fate.

Throughout *Tess*, we see Tess sexualized by Alec and Angel, each believing her to represent their own understanding of femininity. In the eyes of Alec and Angel, she is two completely different women. To the former, she is a "temptress," and to the latter she is "a visionary essence of woman," although, Angel's idea of Tess does shift back and forth throughout the novel.[56] Tess bears some resemblance to Ginevra, in that different senses of identity are placed on her based on her beholder rather than her actions. Alec and Angel place upon her their own understanding of women and femininity, but never truly see Tess for her own attributes. After learning of Tess's affair with Alec, Angel declares that "the woman [he has]

[53] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 48.
[54] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 7.
[55] Pykett, "Ruinous Bodies," 160.
[56] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 343, 146.

been loving is not [Tess]," but "[a]nother woman in [her] shape."[57] In this he is not truly mistaken; he never truly loved Tess for the person she was, but the ideal she represented for him. Through the (differing) characterizations of Tess, Hardy opens up a discourse on what femininity actually is, as well as the concept of purity: his "writing, and […] constructions of feminine beauty, succeeds in revealing the elegance of the human misstep as it posits a new morality, a radical, heroic way of conceptualizing purity."[58] Tess's character differs from the coarse working-class girl many readers would expect her to be. Alec even states that she is "mighty sensitive for a cottage girl," implying both Tess's sensibilities and Alec's preconceived notions of her.[59] In *Tess*, Hardy seems to attempt to reconfigure the role of the fallen woman and the notion of femininity.

From the moment Alec laid eyes upon Tess, her fate as his prey was sealed: "[s]he had an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage just now; and it was this that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her."[60] Alec truly believes he is entitled to Tess's body and that she has tried to 'play hard to get,' when in fact she has been highly opposed to all his advances. He believes her to have "trifled with [his] feelings, eluded [him], and snubbed [him]."[61] She is constantly sexualized by Alec's gaze, and a victim to his sexual urges. Before the devastating events at The Chase, Alec constantly forces Tess to conform to his sexualized image of her and to satisfy his urges. He often touches her when she does not want him to, and kisses her without proper consent:

> He was inexorable, and she sat still, and d'Urberville gave her the kiss of mastery. No sooner had he done so than she flushed with shame, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the spot on her cheek that had been touched by his lips.[62]

It is very clear, throughout the narrative, that Tess wants nothing to do with Alec and his advances; yet she seems destined to fall victim to them through sheer determination and force on Alec's part. The constancy of the male gaze, especially that of Alec, is obvious to Tess: "[b]ygones would never be complete bygones till she was bygone herself."[63]

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[57] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 248-249.
[58] Hoffman-Reyes, "'Terribly Beautiful,'" 42.
[59] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 61.
[60] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 48.
[61] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 79.
[62] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 61.
[63] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 327.

Many critics read Tess as a passive victim, yet what many seem to leave out of the analyses is the total force of patriarchal pressure Tess is under. As in the example above, Tess sits perfectly still and 'allows' Alec to kiss her. I would argue that Tess's passivity is more based in oppression than her own personal weakness. As previously discussed in this thesis, the panoptic structure encompasses all of society and strongly affects its subjects. Tess goes to Trantridge in hopes of earning some money for her family, and is thus solely dependent on Alec:

> But she was more pliable under [Alec's] hands than mere companionship would have made her, owing to her unavoidable dependance upon his mother, and, through that lady's comparative helplessness, upon him.[64]

Alec's unwanted advances are more something for Tess to endure in order to fulfill her role as the dutiful daughter after the death of the family's horse, for which Tess was partly responsible. Julie Grossman discusses how Hardy identifies with Tess as a character, in the way that she is presented as an image, stemming from Hardy's own desire to hide from the critical public.[65] One of her main arguments is that Tess manages to subvert the male gaze through her ability "to create alternative selves to escape the extant identity cruelly defined for her by 'blighted' social conventions."[66] One of the examples used by Grossman is when Tess discusses out-of-body experiences and her understanding of the human soul. In this example, Tess talks about gazing up at "some big bright star" as a means of having the soul leave the body, and this is how "Tess performs her escape."[67] Not only does this give Tess a power of transcendence, but it also gives her the "male-defined power to gaze."[68] However, throughout the novel, Tess's gaze is quite limited and most often turned on herself. The implication of Grossman's argument is thus: Tess is 'empowered' and freed by disassociating from her reality; or, as she puts it, the "corporeal dissolution as an escape from the material oppressiveness represented by that male gaze."[69] The issue with this argument is that it does not take into account the fact that Tess's "desire to melt into the landscape" does not protect her from the very real objectification she is put under and the consequences that follow.[70] I would argue, rather, that Tess's disassociation functions more

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[64] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 68.
[65] Julie Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess* and 'The Photograph:' Images to Die For," *Criticism* 35, no. 4 (Fall, 1993): 609.
[66] Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess*," 615.
[67] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 135-136; Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess*," 613.
[68] Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess*," 613.
[69] Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess*," 613.
[70] Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess*," 612.

as a defense mechanism helping her cope with her situation. It is also this disassociation that has been read as passivity by many critics.

As mentioned earlier, both in this chapter, as well as the thesis as a whole, the gaze can take on many different shapes and forms. In *Tess,* pleasure is the main incarnation of the gaze. Furthering the discussion into the scopophilic nature of the novel and its male characters, both Angel and Alec fall within this category. However, as noted, their forms of scopophilic gaze differ from each other and can both be linked to Freud's castration complex. In terms of psychoanalysis, both men are threatened by the lack that Tess symbolizes, and each use different means to defend themselves from this 'threat.' Mulvey detailed the two methods of escaping the threat of the complex: voyeuristic sadism and scopophilic fetishization. The former entails "asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness," while the latter entails building up "the physical beauty of the object, [and] transforming it into something satisfying in itself."[71] An observation to make is that both male characters exhibit each of the two forms of scopophilic escape, but to varying degrees: they both fetishize Tess, and they both enact some form of punishment of her. The narrator, meanwhile, falls somewhere around fetishization, due to his distance from and lack of interaction with the characters of the novel. Thus, he is only able to see Tess an object out of his reach.

Jekel concisely words the way Tess is tossed between the two men, without having much say in the matter: she is "victimized by Alec, persuaded and then rejected by Angel, claimed again by Alec, and reclaimed by Angel."[72] Angel exhibits more voyeuristic sadism than scopophilic fetishization in his treatment of Tess, while Alec does the opposite. Neither of the men solely place Tess as their object of sexual desire, her image alone is not enough to satisfy them, and they, especially Alec, take out this desire on her physically. This is evident with the progression of *Tess*: "[s]adism demands a story […] Fetishistic scopophilia […] can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone."[73] It is their sexualization of Tess that furthers the plot; the physically detached voyeurism of the narrator cannot progress the story by itself. At first, Angel is deeply in love with Tess, trying to demystify and understand her nature: "he allowed his mind to be occupied with her, deeming his preoccupation to be no more

[71] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 238.
[72] Jekel, "*Tess Durbeyfield,*" 167.
[73] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 238.

than a philosopher's regard of an exceedingly novel, fresh and interesting specimen of womankind."[74] Angel then punishes Tess extensively by his rejection of her after learning of her past; and, through his return at the end of the novel, he completes his oppression of Tess by forgiving her. Alec, on the other hand, is more focused on objectifying Tess for his own sexual gratification, and thus exhibits more scopophilic fetishization. His escape from the castration complex is fetishizing Tess and then punishing her by raping her. Either way, both characters are enforcing Tess's subjugation under the phallocentric rule.

Across all the novels discussed in this thesis, the panoptic structure seems to grow and encompass more and more space: from the panoptic microcosm of the Rue Fossette in *Villette*, to gender performativity and domestic ideals in *The Woman in White*, to the narrator and sexual ideology in *Tess*. Angel's character functions as a stand-in for society and its double standards. Gail Cunningham explores Angel's hypocrisy regarding his own sexual history, noting the eerie similarities in his and Tess's past and reasons for hiding it; yet the consequences for their confessions are vastly different. Tess sees Angel as "her double;" and so it seems on the surface, as they both fear to lose the other by confessing their past transgressions.[75] Both were, according to Cunningham, "the victims of partners older and presumably more experienced than themselves," with Angel having an affair with an older woman in London, and Tess having an affair with Alec against her will, resulting in a child. Angel's confession to Tess lulls her into a false sense of security, tricking her into believing he will forgive her just as she forgives him.[76] After hearing her full confession, Angel refuses to forgive Tess, even though he explicitly states that she was "more sinned against than sinning," cementing Angel's normative double standard.[77] He even intertwines his own class prejudices into his rejection of Tess, claiming her d'Urberville lineage has furthered her fall as a woman. Not only does he hold her to the general standards of society regarding women, but his knowledge of her aristocratic family also makes him judge her even more sternly.[78] He seems to be fully unaware of his own hypocrisy, and of how much he has been integrated into the system of the oppression of women.

[74] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 144.
[75] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 242.
[76] Cunningham, *The New Woman*, 100-102.
[77] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 251.
[78] Cunningham, *The New Woman*, 102.

Tess's physical beauty is often emphasized in the novel and seems to be the main source of her misfortune. After painfully learning the effect her beauty has on men, through her interactions with Alec, she "resolved to run no further risks from her appearance" in an attempt to protect herself from the male gaze, and "keep off […] casual lovers."[79] She changes to her old, more tattered clothes, and tightly ties a handkerchief around her face. She even goes to the length of cutting off her eyebrows, to thus be "insured against aggressive admiration."[80] Once Alec returns in the narrative, so does his infatuation with Tess's form. He declares himself to be a changed man, yet this is fast proven to be false, as one glance at Tess makes him lust for her again: "the effect upon [him] was electric." He claims that he "was firm as a man could be till [he] saw those eyes and that mouth again."[81]

> I saw you innocent, and I deceived you. Four years after, you find me a Christian enthusiast; you then work upon me, perhaps to my complete perdition […] Of course you have done nothing except retain your pretty face and shapely figure. […] you field-girls should never wear those bonnets if you wish to keep out of danger. […] I am not going to feel responsible for my deeds and passions if there's nobody to be responsible to."[82]

However, Alec never atones for his gazes: he only shifts the blame onto Tess. Not only is she responsible for his gazes, according to Alec, but she is also the "cause of [his] backsliding" to his horrid and deviant behavior.[83]

While Tess seems to be aware of her own beauty and budding sexuality when we first meet her, she is yet too young to fully comprehend how this will affect her life: "[s]he had inherited the feature from her mother without the quality it denoted."[84] At the beginning of the novel, Tess is a naïve country girl; but she soon learns the hardness and the sheer power of the male gaze. This is further evidenced in her conversation with Alec, while traveling back to Marlott, stating that she "didn't understand [Alec's] meaning till it was too late."[85] On the other hand, Joan Durbeyfield, Tess's mother, is fully aware of the value of Tess's beauty. She plays her part in the patriarchal system of the commerce of women, and is almost as complicit in

[79] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 299.
[80] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 299.
[81] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 343.
[82] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 350.
[83] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 351.
[84] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 48.
[85] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 89.

Tess's 'fall' as Alec is, due to her encouraging the union rather than protecting her daughter from the predator:

> "Well, as one of the genuine stock, she ought to make her way with 'en, if she plays her trump card aright. And if he don't marry her *afore*, he will *after*. For that he's all afire wi' love for her any eye can see."
> "What's her trump card? Her d'Urberville blood, you mean?"
> "No, stupid; her face – as 'twas mine."[86]

In this conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Durbeyfield, the latter is perfectly aware of the potential consequences of sending Tess off to Trantridge, and yet does not seem fazed to any degree. Unlike Madame Beck, who spies on her students in order to 'protect' them, Mrs. Durbeyfield ultimately acts as her daughter's madam, 'selling' her to Alec in order to increase her monetary value and gain social status. Those around her seem to be more aware of the potential scandal and ruin this can lead to, as a drunk patron of Rolliver's inn notes: "But Joan Durbeyfield must mind that she don't get green malt in floor."[87] In the explanatory notes to the 2008 Oxford World's Classics of *Tess*, this "local phrase" is explained as meaning "to have a daughter in childbed before she is married."[88] Not only does this function as a general warning from said character, but also as foreshadowing of Tess's misfortunes, because she does, in fact, return from Trantridge poultry farm pregnant and unmarried.

Although Tess is obviously suffering from her fateful encounter with Alec at The Chase, her mother sees things very differently. Upon relating her troubles to her mother, Mrs. Durbeyfield accuses Tess of being selfish, wondering why she did not "think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking only of [herself]?"[89] In her mind, she *is* protecting her daughter, and her family, through her pressuring Tess into marrying Alec. Mrs. Durbeyfield seems to not understand why Tess would not want to marry Alec, especially after he 'ruined' her:

> "And yet th'st not got him to marry 'ee!" reiterated her mother.
> "Any woman would have done it but you, after that!"
> "Perhaps any woman would, except me."[90]

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[86] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 58 (italics added).
[87] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 33.
[88] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 33; Nancy Barrineau, explanatory notes to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy, eds. Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 424.
[89] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 93.
[90] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 93.

Through her entanglement, Tess still manages to keep her own sense of morality and might show herself to be less passive than many critics believe. By resisting conformity by marrying Alec in order to 'save' her image, she stands her ground and refuses to become even more victimized by an oppressive system. Cunningham also reads Tess's actions in a positive light, claiming that "[b]y sacrificing her own interest to honesty, and doing so in a context where women would normally be expected […] to do the opposite, Tess is unwittingly making a more general protest for women against the social conventions which foster deceit as an essential part of their nature."[91] Just as the panoptic structure of Victorian society interpellated Madame Beck as a subject, it too interpellated Mrs. Durbeyfield. The ideology is the same, the means of enforcement different. Tess thus stands in contrast with the cemented systems of gender roles represented by her mother, and, as we have seen, Angel.

3.4 Woman as Spectacle

On the surface, Alec seems to be the greatest threat to Tess, and he is by far the most physical threat to her 'virtue.' However, as one digs deeper into the narrative, a more concerning and intricate web of judgmental and scopophilic gazes emerges. Unlike the other novels discussed, *Tess* presents a special case in the form of the narrator. Building on Miller's idea of different levels of surveillance in *The Woman in White*, so too does *Tess* have several layers of gazing.[92] These layers can be separated into three: the diegetic gazes, the gazes of the narrator; and, finally, the gazes of the reader of *Tess*. One might note that Hardy is floating somewhere between the two outer layers.

The narrator is a voyeur, unable to be physically close to his object of affection; he thus takes great satisfaction in reducing her to an object of purely visual sexual gratification. The behavior of the narrator is fascinating because it seems as though he desperately wants to be a part of the story so he can have Tess, and this highly affects the narrative. His sexualization of Tess is borderline pathological. Not only is he constantly fetishizing Tess, but he also seems to alter and elide crucial parts of the narrative. Many argue that this stems from censoring; and that

[91] Cunningham, *The New Woman*, 97.
[92] Miller, "*Cage aux folles*," 164.

would, to some degree, be accurate, as the sexual nature of the novel led to immense outcry.[93] Yet, I would argue, just as Boumelha does, that these omissions in the narrative stem from the narrator's jealousy of the men who actually *can* have Tess.[94] The pivotal scene of the rape in The Chase is completely omitted, and Tess's affair with Angel at Talbothays is related through innuendo in the imagery of nature. "[T]o *almost* everybody she was a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more."[95] The addition of the word *almost* hints at someone, and although it might be either Alec or Angel, I would argue that it hints towards the narrator's own emotions regarding Tess; it exemplifies the narrator's belief that he has a special bond with Tess. Yet the readers of *Tess,* who are one voyeuristic layer further from the novel, are painstakingly aware that this is not the case. Just as the narrator is unaware of the reader, Tess is unaware of the narrator. The narrator, in psychoanalytic terms, creates Tess into an image in order to escape the threat of her lack; Tess's "construction as image […] speaks to her viewer's or maker's desire for visual control."[96] Because he cannot have her, he resorts to controlling her image for both himself and the reader. Tess as object is created by the male gaze of the narrator (Hardy): "so alive was she to a fancied gaze which might be resting upon her."[97] In many ways, she cannot exist without the gaze; yet it is also the instrument of her demise.

The narrator is always focused on Tess's features, lingering on her "mobile peony mouth," her "flexuous and finely-drawn figure," and her "oval face […] with deep dark eyes and long heavy clinging tresses, which seem to clasp in a beseeching way anything they fall against."[98] Tess becomes the object of the narrator's obsession, and we follow him gazing at Tess throughout her life; his gazes satisfying his "fascination with the interiority of her sexuality, and his desire to take possession of her."[99] Because of his placement in the narrative, he is unable to reach Tess and 'claim' her, so he has to settle for the gratification gained from fetishized scopophilia. His focus is on the body he cannot obtain and enact his fantasies upon; so, instead, the narrator fixes Tess's body as gratification in itself. However, at times, this does not seem to

[93] Cunningham, *The New Woman*, 103; Higonnet, "A Woman's Story," 15; Kristin Brady, "Thomas Hardy and the Matters of Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 93-94.
[94] Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 121.
[95] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 21 (italics added).
[96] Silverman, "History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity," 27.
[97] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 326.
[98] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 20, 101.
[99] Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 120.

be enough for him: "[p]erhaps the reason why she seduces casual attention is that she never courts it, though the other women often gaze around them."[100] Here, the narrator seems to put blame on Tess lacking the desire to be gazed at, postulating that this might be the precise reason for why she is so often sexualized throughout the narrative. This presents an interesting insight into the narrator: not only is part of his fascination with Tess based on her lack of coquettishness, but he is also trying to justify his own gazing, shifting the responsibility onto Tess. Through his "erotic fantasies" the narrator "enact[s] a pursuit, violation, and persecution of Tess."[101] He enforces his power upon a victim that is so desperately trying to escape the male gaze and takes great pleasure in doing so.

Many critics see Hardy and the narrator of *Tess* as the same person, almost, both being enthralled with Tess's beauty.[102] In reality, Hardy, much like the real reader, stands completely outside the narrative. The *implied author*, on the other hand, is the real reader's reconstruction based on the narrative.[103] Thus, the ideals that many accredit to Hardy, be they sexist or feminist, are based on their own interpretation of the novel. In many ways, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to truly analyze Hardy's ideology, because it is far away from the narrative. Whatever Hardy's true intentions with *Tess* were, they are lost due to the subjectivity of its readers, and thus their creation and understanding of the implied author. The implied author created the narrator of the story, as well as the events of the novel. Alone, this author is unable to directly relay any information, but rather communicates through the structure they have created in the novel.[104] What I would argue is this: although the analysis of the *intentions* of both Hardy and the implied author has been rendered meaningless, the implied author is still entangled in the scopophilic regime of the novel elaborated by the narrator, as well as the characters and real reader.

Tess becomes an object of spectacle, with the contribution of *Tess*'s readers: her "voice, her past, her psyche - all of these are sights to see."[105] Through her objectification by the male gaze, especially that of the narrator, every aspect of Tess's life, even the smallest of interactions or actions become spectacles:

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[100] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 101.
[101] Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 120.
[102] Brady, "Thomas Hardy and the Matters of Gender," 99.
[103] Chatman, "Discourse," 148.
[104] Chatman, "Discourse," 148.
[105] Nunokawa, "Tess, Tourism," paragraph 7.

> Minute diamonds of moisture from the mist hung, too, upon Tess's eyelashes, and drops upon her hair, like seed pearls. When the day grew quite strong and commonplace these dried off her; moreover, Tess then lost her strange and ethereal beauty; her teeth, lips, and eyes scintillated in the sunbeams and she was again the dazzlingly fair dairymaid only, who had to hold her own against the other women of the world.[106]

The narrator's overly detailed descriptions of Tess throughout the narrative make every single part of her open to be seen by all. The descriptive narrative makes a spectacle of everything, including Tess's beauty. The gaze in *Tess* "ratifies the perennial stationing of the feminine spectacle as the site of masculine violence," and "[u]ltimately Tess remains a body, the object of the narrator's gaze" and "an object of pity offered for the reader's textual consumption."[107] The narrator, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, takes great satisfaction in the physical aspects of Tess, yet also to her suffering, intentional or not.

The violent gaze in *Tess*, and the scopophilic gratification gained from it, can be quite concerning; but it also shows the inevitability of the violence women face at the hands (and eyes) of men: "[e]ach man kills the thing he loves – and he loves to do it. *Tess* becomes, thus, a titillating snuff movie we run in our own minds."[108] Through the gaze, Tess is finally 'subdued' by her execution, with her "death reveal[ing] the closest of connections between taming a woman and arranging her for show, between hanging her and hanging her."[109] According to Nunokawa, "[t]o subjugate a woman in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is to enlist her for display, to frame her either as the object or the surface of an exhibition."[110] Thus, the novel's function is to subjugate women, namely Tess, through objectification. This I agree with, in terms of women being objectified and placed as spectacles to be gazed at by men in order for them (men) to retain their power over them. Tess's execution at the end of the novel is simply the final spectacle, putting an end to Tess's misery. However, her hanging becomes symbolic, as the actual hanging is not described in the narrative. In itself, it is horrible enough; but understanding the implications of what led her there is far more grim. Throughout *Tess,* Tess has been ruthlessly pursued and victimized by the male gaze, leading her to murder her violent oppressor and victimizer.

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[106] Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* 146-147.
[107] Nunokawa, "Tess, Tourism," paragraph 5; Pykett, "Ruinous Bodies," 161.
[108] James Kincaid, "'You did not come': Absence, Death and Eroticism in *Tess*," in *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*, ed. Regina Barreca (London: Macmillan, 1990), 29.
[109] Nunokawa, "Tess, Tourism," paragraph 2.
[110] Nunokawa, "Tess, Tourism," paragraph 2.

Hoffman-Reyes claims that Hardy "crafts [Tess's] body as a discursive space where visuality tenders intellectual knowledge."[111] In other words, Hardy used Tess's beauty as an instrument to entice the readers into the story so that he could forward his message; the spectacle of Tess's body became a guise in which an agenda was furthered. According to Hoffman-Reyes, Hardy "situate[s] Tess as recognizably ideal from the perspective of late nineteenth-century biological theory," and "links this notion of the ideal from the physical to the moral and in doing so redefines assumptions about what constitutes feminine virtue."[112] On the surface, this seems reasonable enough. However, the concept of using Tess's body to gain more readers, no matter the cause, still leads to more objectification, thus furthering well-established norms and problematizing the position of the reader in this scopophilic regime.

The complexity of understanding Tess as image and spectacle does enhance other issues, as postulated by Pykett. By "exploring the ways in which the woman pays the price of male desire, the novel also makes its readers complicit in this process, and in those desires" by "repeatedly staging Tess's suffering as spectacle, as a drama from which the reader is increasingly distanced."[113] Tess's suffering at the hands of Alec, Angel, and society, as well as her beauty, becomes a thrill for the reader to enjoy from a distance. As in all novels, the reader is the outer voyeur, gazing at the characters from a safe distance. This placement of the reader is similar to the dark room the gazers in cinema inhabit, being placed in "a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience […] playing on their voyeuristic fantasies."[114] It should be noted that the reader of a novel is somewhat different than the audience in the cinema, because their part in furthering the narrative is more active; they need to continue reading for the novel's contents to unfold, and not have it presented to them passively.

As discussed in the previous chapter, regarding the reader, *Tess*'s readers are also made complicit in her objectification. After all, what is literature if not a presentation of spectacular events? The distinction between the implied reader and the real reader is important because the implied reader is within the realm of the narrative, just as the narrator and the implied author are. The implied reader, here, can often be very different than the true reader. As Mitchell notes, this

[111] Hoffman-Reyes, "'Terribly Beautiful,'" 39.
[112] Hoffman-Reyes, "'Terribly Beautiful,'" 34.
[113] Pykett, "Ruinous Bodies," 161.
[114] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 234.

causes readers, especially feminist readers, to "applaud his feminism and to deplore his sexism," leading Hardy's work to become "one of the richest and complex sources of feminist commentary."[115] The issue lies with the real reader being pulled into the scopophilic regime in which Tess is oppressed. As readers, they are unable to escape the grip of the gaze of *Tess*'s narrator; and to further the plot, they have to not only accept this objectifying gaze, but also have to physically enact it by reading the words themselves.

What is further problematized by this aspect of voyeurism is the gender of the real reader. As with the narrator, the implied reader is also male, and thus both of them are simply relieving their anxiety of castration. However, what happens if the true reader is female? Basing on the schema presented by Mulvey, and her further explanations of the position of the female spectator within cinema, "the female spectator may find herself so out of key with the pleasure on offer […] that the spell of fascination is broken," or "[s]he may find herself secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides."[116] Thus, women can only identify with the woman being objectified on screen or on the page, or with the male character doing the objectification.[117] This places the female reader in a predicament; either she allows herself to be objectified by proxy, or she performs the masochistic act of objectifying herself.

The presence of the narrator, as well as the real readers of *Tess*, leads to a continual gaze from which Tess is unable to escape, showcasing the pervasiveness of the male gaze. She attempts to flee from Alec's sexualizing gaze, as well as Marlott's judgmental gaze; yet through the novel's structure, Tess is always bound by the narrator, as well as the reader, without whom she would cease to exist. In the novel, "Hardy repeatedly shifts between fixing the image of Tess as a particular object of male vision and permitting her to defy the male gaze by escaping into an all-powerful incorporeal conception of femininity."[118] Tess's figuration and objectification problematizes the notion of Victorian femininity, just as we have seen in *The Woman in White*, due to the term's unreliability and our inability to truly determine its meaning. Throughout the novel, Tess is constantly projected upon, never having a true form in herself, solely being "the

[115] Mitchell, "Hardy's Female Reader," 185-186.
[116] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Duel in the Sun' (King Vidor, 1946)," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no 15/17 (Summer 1981): 12.
[117] Mitchell, "Hardy's Female Reader," 174.
[118] Grossman, "Hardy's *Tess*," 609.

formulations of others and of herself. […] constituted so as to suit the other's purpose."[119] Her purpose is multidimensional, depending on the gazer. To Alec, Angel, and the narrator, she is an object of sexual gratification, albeit on different levels. To Hardy, she is a pure and misunderstood woman used to criticize Victorian society; although her biggest purpose is to be an object of enjoyment for the reader, having her tragic life played out for their gratification.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* presents one the most graphic and detrimental effects of the gaze out of the novels discussed in this thesis. In *Tess*, the male gaze takes on its most violent and sexualized form, taking great satisfaction in the objectification of Tess Durbeyfield. Like most novels, *Tess* presents layered gazing in the form of diegetic characters, the narrator, and finally the real reader. However, the gazing that is presented within it is highly objectifying and sexualizing, taking great pleasure in making Tess into a spectacle for others to enjoy. Very often, Tess is read by critics as a passive victim of male violence, and that is somewhat true. Yet as we have seen in this chapter, Tess is not solely passive throughout the narrative, although her actions in maintaining her moral integrity do nothing to alleviate her hardships.

In the novel, we see the full extent of the violent repercussions of the male gaze. Although integral to the furthering of the plot, Alec d'Urberville functions more as a catalyst rather than ultimate oppressor; Angel Clare is also instrumental to Tess's pain. Both these men gaze at Tess and fix her as an image based on their own preconceived notions of femininity and womanhood; however, the ultimate voyeur is the narrator, and the real readers he (un)intentionally manages to drag with him into his objectification of Tess. The levels of scopophilia in *Tess* have been important to analyze because it gives greater understanding of the full scope of the gaze. *Tess* exemplifies how truly trapped women are by the male gaze, and how difficult it is to escape as it follows them in one shape or other.

[119] Kincaid, "'You did not come,'" 13.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this thesis, the gaze encompasses more than just the sexual objectification of women, although it does play a substantial role in it. Although the panoptic structure is at the center of normative rule, surveillance, and the oppression of women, the gaze is its tool of enforcement. Throughout this thesis, I have implemented different feminist theories that feed into the concept of surveillance and its social implications. Each theory aids in understanding how the gaze, as an extension of panopticism, interacts and shapes female life within Victorian literature. By using different angles in the exploration of the gaze, this thesis has shed a light on the fickle and complex nature of the gaze, as it does not manifest itself in one single form, but rather appears in different places and shapes within society. For women, the gaze is impossible to escape, both in the real world and in literary form; it is especially difficult for the women *in* the texts, because the gaze of the reader and the narrator will almost always be on them. Due to the sly nature of the gaze, it permeates society and is incorporated into every aspect of female existence. What this thesis aimed to show is that not only do women have to contend with the gaze every day, but that they too partake in it; and, in some ways are the tool of their own oppression.

In each novel, the gaze has presented itself differently, and has thus had different implications for the female characters it affected. In *Villette*, it takes on its most surveilling form, as both the town of Villette and the Rue Fossette each form their own panoptic structure. The novel presents different reactions to the surveilling gaze of society, mostly in the shape of Madame Beck and M. Paul. This gaze, through its reinforcement of gender norms, attempts to place different roles upon the female characters. Paulina Home is the novel's perfect domestic angel; and this thesis has explored her gender performativity, as she is the character in *Villette* that is the most entangled in the performance of Victorian domestic ideals. Lucy is the one character that society attempts to force domesticity and normative roles upon the most, but she is quite resistant to this. The roles the other characters ascribe to Lucy are based on their own perceptions of her, and not her actual presentation of character. In fact, very little of Lucy's character is explicitly presented to the reader. Lucy's reluctance to present her true nature to her audience can be understood as her attempts to escape the judging gaze of the readers of her story, something we see that Tess is not able to do, as she is not in charge of her own story. This novel

is also the only one discussed in this thesis where the most oppressive gaze is, in fact, a female gaze. The female characters in *Villette* have been interpellated as subjects into an oppressive ideology and manipulated into ultimately enforcing the oppressive male gaze upon other women and on themselves. Lucy is the most judgmental gazer in the novel, as well as being the only heroine in all three novels who is fully permitted to gaze.

The Woman in White differs by furthering the subtle critique of the domestic angel that appeared in *Villette*. Laura Fairlie is the less capable, and more helpless, version of Paulina. However, unlike Paulina who changes the presentation of her own identity based on who is gazing at her, Laura is completely unaware of this performativity. Rather, she becomes the embodiment of Collins's critique of Victorian gender norms and domesticity. In addition to devaluing the angelic Laura, *The Woman in White* places a more forceful and capable heroine in her stead. Marian Halcombe is a very different heroine than the others discussed in this thesis because she does not fall within the phallic binary, but rather exists somewhere outside of it and has a more fluid presentation of her female identity. Often, throughout the narrative, she is described in masculine terms and likened to men, in addition to devaluating women with her words. The gaze in this novel has also become more sexually loaded, with Walter Hartright often using his gaze to objectify Marian and explore the physical appearance of other female characters. The character of Marian also presents an interesting conundrum: while Walter is presented as the 'hero' of the piece, it is in fact Marian who actually performs the duties of the hero. Thus, Marian is both the hero and heroine of *The Woman in White*.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is the most sexual in nature, with the sexual relations between Tess Durbeyfield and Alec d'Urberville being at the center of the narrative. The novel gives great insight into the detrimental effects of the male gaze. Not only does Alec's uncontrollable lust for Tess cause her great anguish, but the judgmental and normatively enforcing gaze of Angel Clare is even more damaging to our poor heroine. Angel stands as a representation of the gaze of Victorian society, and places Tess in her exile through his condemnation of her actions. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is also the only novel discussed that does not have a character narrating the story, but rather a detached narrator. This takes even more agency away from Tess, making her completely unable to control her own story and others' perceptions of her. The novel also has the most layered form of gazing, stretching from the diegetic characters to the narrator, to the implied author, and finally, to the readers of the novel. The narrator of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

is the most sexualizing one; he might even have the most sexualizing gaze of all, even dragging the reader into his scopophilic fantasies.

The aspects of the gaze that have been explored in this thesis have been integral in the further development of the discussion of Victorian sexuality and gender norms. By including different aspects of the gaze in the discussion, this thesis has opened up for a broader understanding of the gaze, both as a branch of panopticism and as something that is not only a male activity. Most critics research and analyze one manifestation of the gaze: most commonly, the male gaze. This narrows not only the analysis of Victorian literature, but also the understanding of the complexity of many of the female characters, such as Marian and Lucy. Lucy relies heavily on her own gaze in her judgments of others, and both her and Marian are more impervious to the gaze than their angelic counterparts, Paulina and Laura, due to their social statuses and appearances. Most of the critiques used to aid in the analysis of *The Woman in White* place Marian within the gender binary, when it is obvious that she does not belong there, and that comparing her to either men or women undermines her fantastic, intricate character. Each of the heroines in these novels, Lucy, Marian, and Tess, represent different incarnations of Victorian women; thus, the analysis of their characters is important to the discussion of what femininity and womanhood is and how it presents itself in spite of the gaze.

Although the gaze has been thoroughly analyzed and discussed in this thesis, the exploration of the female gaze is something that needs to be developed further. Many academic discussions regarding the gaze seem to only focus on the male incarnation, completely forgetting women and their gaze. As discussed, women too, are capable of gazing, although it is rarely as sexual as that performed by male characters. It would be interesting to explore how the female gaze presents itself in relation to women's own understanding of self. The exploration of the role of the reader in terms of the gaze is also something that needs further discussion. The final chapter explores how the narrator of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* implicates the reader in his objectification of Tess. Although this aspect is present in all novels, it became more apparent in Hardy's. The aspiration for this thesis was to broaden the understanding of femininity in Victoria literature, in hopes of gaining a greater understanding of the heroines that do not conform, and do not fall within what feminist critique accepts as 'good' feminist role models. The goal for feminist criticism is not to devalue difficult or complex female characters based on a schema of realism or 'usefulness,' but rather to broaden the spectrum of the understanding of female

behavior. Otherwise, it becomes as restrictive and oppressive as the hold of the patriarchal structure it aims to abolish.

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